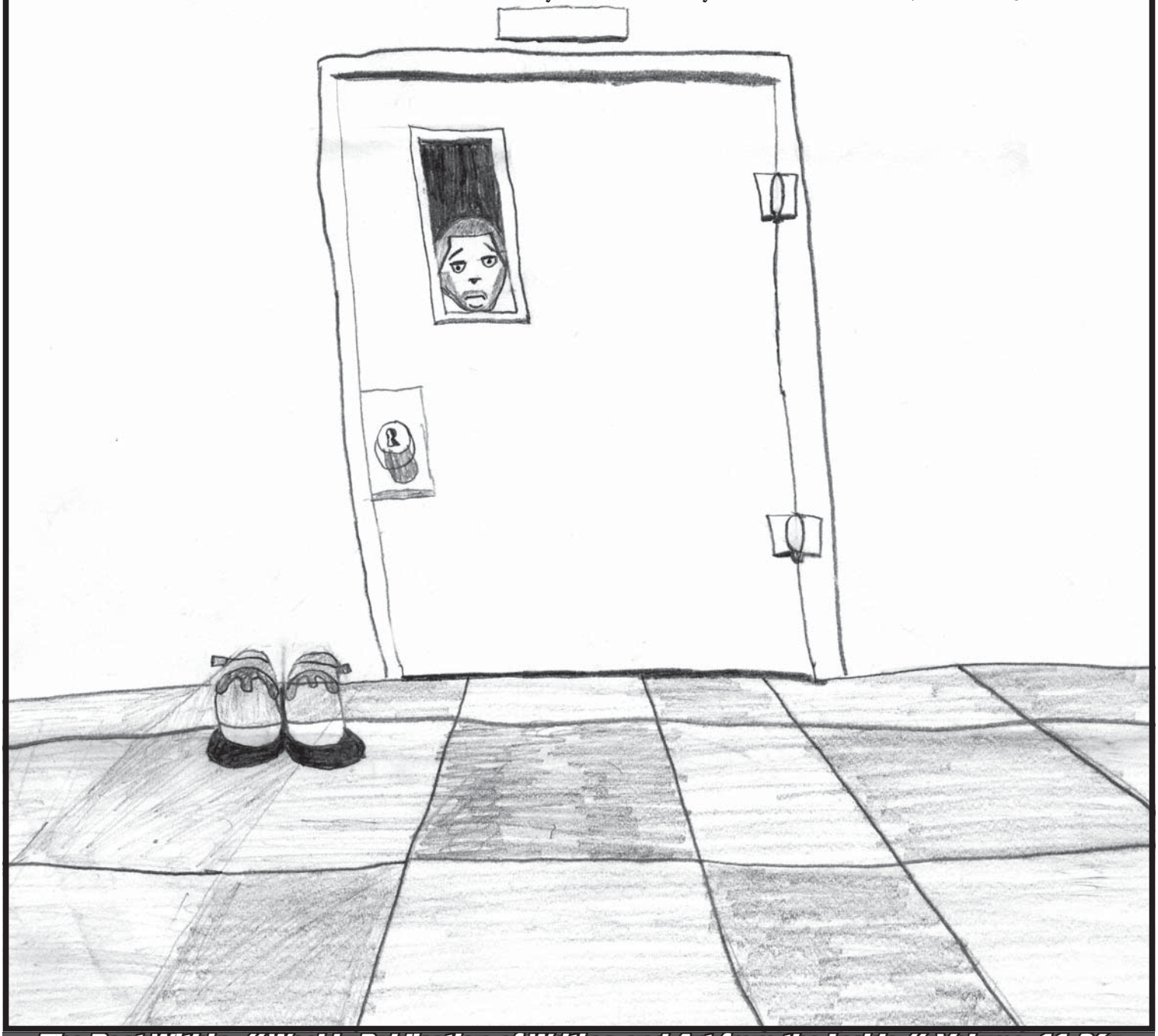
Even though I've already changed I'm still locked up. The more I change the harder it gets to do the right thing, and the more people try to tempt you. So it seems to me you can change in your room but when you come out for rec the people around you force you to act as you used to.

read the rest of Kevin's and all of the LA Juvenile Hall's pieces on page 4-5



EDITOR'S NOTE: VOLUME 11.36+

Hey Beat editorial note readers, welcome to another powerful edition of The Beat Within. We'd like to do something different this week; we'd like to begin by announcing the topics that were discussed prior to the great writing from the workshops. This week we will feature not only the 11.36 writings, we will also feature the remaining pieces from 11.35!

The 11.35 topics were "Nothing More Racist Than That" -In a recent speech, the Reverend Al Sharpton — the African-American Civil Rights leader and candidate for President of the United States in 2004 — said this: "I think we have allowed a whole generation of young (black) people to feel that if they're focused, they're not black enough. If they speak well and act well, they're acting white... and there's nothing more racist than that!" What The Beat wants to know is, what do you think Rev. Sharpton meant by this, and do you agree or disagree. Tell us why.

The second topic, "What Makes Your Smile Disappear?" -From time to time we all have joyful moments when that smile of beauty appears on our face. What we want to know is what makes that smile turn into a frown? What makes it disappear? What can trigger your mind to bring your happiness to an end? Describe to us a time where you felt happy, but the happiness faded away, and the smile disappeared into the air.

Last topic but not least, "Ticket Out" – This week we want you to tell us what you think is your ticket out of the system, off the streets and away from negative violent living? We have all heard stories about famous and not so famous finding this ticket out of this hard living, because of a mentor, a job, their lyrical/writing gifts, their athleticism, or simply believing in a better way and their hunger/drive to get up and out, and not look back to their old ways. In detail, tell us what you honestly believe is your ticket out of the chaos and what will it take to reach that destination. If you really think you are stuck, and there is no ticket out for you, then spell that out for us too.

Now for the topics for 11.36 issue are the very popular "Living With War" – Often it seems like war is simply inescapable. Daily, we can read about various wars from our local newspapers, we can see all types of wars on television, we can also choose to listen to strangers on the bus or in our community discuss their wars, and definitely we find ourselves fighting our own personal war with ourselves. The truth is, like it or not, we are at war, and we want to know how you live with war. Think about the various types of wars: there's the war on poverty, the gang wars in our communities, the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, the war in Iraq, and the war with family and friends to name a few. This week we want to hear from you how you deal with living with war. How did you get yourself involved in this war? Is there a solution? We also want to hear from you how you see your/this war coming to an end. What will it take to live in peace? Tell us your honest Beat respectful thoughts on Living With War.

Second was the equally popular, "What I'd Like To Forget" —Has anything happened to you that you would like to erase from your memory forever? How about a decision that caused you to be in distress for a long time? Maybe it's something cruel you said to someone you love that hurts you to think about. Maybe it's a cruelty that someone said or did to you, someone who should have known better. The Beat wants you to tell us about a single memory, a single incident, that is so engraved into your memory that you just wish it to go away. We want to know as many details about it as you remember. How did it happen? Where, when, and who was involved? Maybe by dealing with it on paper and in detail, you can help finally put it to rest.

And lastly, "Favorite Cartoon Character" — Since "The Simpsons" hit it big, a whole new crop of cartoon shows have been added to television's nightly programming. There's "Family Guy," "South Park," "SpongeBob SquarePants," "Futurama," "The Boondocks," "New American Dad," and many, many more. Do you have a favorite cartoon character? Is it Bart Simpson ("Eat my shorts,") or Homer ("Doh!")? Is it Cartman in "South Park" or one of the kids in "The Boondocks"? What do you like about your favorite cartoon character? Why is he or she your favorite? Are you like poor, misunderstood Lisa Simpson or the smart-ass baby (Stuey) in "Family Guy"? Are you Hank Hill in "King Of The Hill" or a hero or villain we haven't named here? Tell us your favorite TV cartoon character, why he or she is your favorite — and what you have anything in common with your choice.

The main topic that we discussed last week was "Living With War." This editor asked a young colleague, who goes by the name Scorpion and who once wrote in The Beat Within from juvenile hall, his thoughts on the topic. This editor was so moved by his off-the-top-of-his-head thoughts, that we thought we would share it in this editorial note. So let's give Scorpion the floor! Scorp!

My life is so full of war, it's coming out of my ears, nose and belly button. War has been in my life since day one at the hospital when my father divorced my mom as soon as she had me. Also that day that I was born, I had a hole on my heart and was born blue; it was a war for me to hold on so I could live. I have experienced war throughout my life in divorce also. I had to deal with my dad writing dirty words next to my mothers name in our phone book. It was actually war with words when I got old enough to understand what was going on in our house.

I began by acting like a complete spoiled brat to my stepmother, even though it was she who raised me from age two to age eleven. I kicked her and punched her and told her that she wasn't my mother and that she was the devil in disguise. I can't recall how many times I reduced that wonderful woman to tears because I didn't like what she said. Late at night I would scream at my walls because they were separating me from my real mother and getting in my way. My household was a living nightmare all the time.

But not all war was fought in my house. There was always a mental war going on between my stepfather and me. It became an unspoken contest to see who had the last word on any and all subjects.

We all live with war in our family, our 'hood, and our lives in general. I learned to deal with a war that was/is raging on in my brain in juvenile hall by all of the time alone. Basically I sat there with the problem for a good three months going completely crazy in my cell. I screamed at each individual brick in my cell and beat my fists bloody on the concrete. Then I had an inspiration. Why couldn't I just calm my brain down so that my mind would quiet? What good are breaking knuckles when I'm not accomplishing anything but pain? I thought about that for about eight hours and blocked everything else out.

The staff thought that I had been paralyzed because I did not move at all during my thinking period. I thought and my mind clinked and clanked and I realized that after the eight hours were up, that my mind had been clogged with so much mess, that I couldn't concentrate on anything for more than a few seconds. I then picked up a pen and wrote out exactly what I was feeling at the time. At first, it came out garbled and disoriented. I didn't really understand the flow of consciousness that was developing on the paper in front of me. After about a half an hour though, I noticed that my thoughts were more concentrated on one subject and not dealing with everything at once.

As a matter of fact, if you read The Beats from that period of time, you will see that I wrote poem after poem after poem on one subject trying to force everything I could out of my head in order to clear it. I learned from that experience that when my mind is clear, I could write incredible poetry and just create more freely in general when I have my mind set to the "creativity channel" of my brain.

I am now disciplined to cope with my own personal war that rages on to this day. I have tried medication but that just makes me numb and able to sleep anywhere that I want.

War is everywhere. I am a victim of war in ways that most people never experience but many unfortunately have experienced in their own daily life. I am what you would call a "war machine" of sorts. When I was living with my parents I created it, and now that I am on my own, I revel in it with a vengeance that can only be matched and compared with a raging steroid pumped bull. Like right there, I would never have been able to come up with that metaphor had my mind not been clear of all inhibitions.

But I think that the biggest tool that I possess is music. I absolutely think that music is my life and soul. My Grandpa doesn't think that I should listen to music but I disagree with him. He calls music "intense electronic thumb-sucking." Basically what I am saying is that he believes that you should keep your mind clear by your own ways and not resort to an electronic band-aid.

Me on the other hand disagree to the fullest. I think that music in headphones,not only puts you in the mood that you want to be in, but also helps you concentrate on what you are trying to do or accomplish. Me, right now, I am blasting Tool from my small I-Mac speakers and according to my word count have written 855 words. I am conquering the war that is scraping at the inside of my skull trying to conquer.

War can be so many things like guns and gangs and politics in general. I do not enjoy politics in any respect so I will not even go into that subject. It is one of those things that I would not touch with a ten-foot pole. No-No. I think that music is the key to everything in the world. Like take this for instance... George W. Bush, Osama Bin Laden, all the world leaders and actually everyone in the world, now that you mention it, if every single person on this earth sat down and listened to, say, Bob Marley, or Sade, or something with a special significance to each individual person. If everybody did that at the same time and were put in a better place, there would be complete world peace! For a while at least, until they took their earphones off. I think that the three minutes that everyone took would be magical and let people know for a moment that you don't have to worry about your job or lack of one, money, or sex, or your spouse, or anything at all. You would have no responsibilities whatsoever. I truly believe that it would solve the "war" that everybody is so uptight about.

My boss has assigned me 1500 words for you Beat readers, and I am at 1096 and going strong. Whoooooohoooooo! I am at war with my fingers right now because I haven't trained them to type as fast as I think. Come to think of it, that would be extremely fast.

War... The definition of war is as follows: An armed conflict between countries or groups that involves killing and destruction. Now think about that for just a minute. An armed conflict. When two people are arguing, they are using their information on the subject of the argument as what? As ammo, therefore armed. So case in point, war does not mean just guns although that is a big genre that is all too real for too many people.

Now, killing and destruction. That to me means destroying, not necessarily killing. How do you end an argument? I usually say that I won when the other person either backs off because they have an absence of said "ammo," or I keep on it till we reach a compromise. That is my ideal ending to a "verbal war" as we are calling it. So case in point, I don't think that war is anything that can't be dealt with. Take an argument that my grandpa and me had the other day. Well actually, it was more of a debate than an argument really. I said that a human being couldn't be absolutely perfect in every way. (The argument started on the subject of Jesus Christ dying because nobody is perfect like him so he died so we wouldn't have to be.) He said that many people are in fact perfect in every way shape or form. No more than twenty or thirty but he said it was possible.

Now let me tell you, my grandfather is one of the most intelligent men I have ever spoken to. He is articulate, has a vocabulary that rivals out-of-date dictionaries, (he actually has said dictionary on his side-table as we speak). When he gets into a debate he has all the "ammo" in the world. I have not won a debate with him yet, but I believe that day will be here soon. He brought out his knowledge of all the books that he had read and slapped them down on the table early in the conversation. Did I mention he is an avid reader? Anyway, we were supposed to go to bed at 11:30 when we started the conversation, and we ended up crashing at about 12:30 to one o'clock in the morning. That was a verbal war, a tongue lashing on both ends if you will. But even though he sort of convinced me that he was right, I learned a lot and I hope he did too. That is the only instance that I can figure out that makes "war" okay to happen.

Wow, unbelievable writing! We hope you too enjoyed Scorpions thoughts on his war.

Before we go lets give big shout out to our POW winners! They are Big Vic (writes 2), Lil' Mainy, Choyce, Jacob, Lil' Jt, and Nay-Nay all from the 150 Crew. From SF/YGC we have Mark, Grimy, Cherry (writes 2), and Sleepy. Last but not least we have Cruz (writes 2) from Marin.

Before we call it a note, allow us to remind you the time is now to consider submitting a piece to our 16th editorial note writing contest! The topic to consider is, "A Letter To The President." For this contest we want you serious writers to write a letter to President Bush! It is our goal to not only post these letters in The Beat Within publication and our website, but to send them off to the White House too! Now, do we need to suggest topics on what to talk about? Doubt it. So with this said, our contest question is all about you writing a letter to President Bush.

The deadline, deadline will be Election Day, Tuesday, November 7, 2006. As is the case with all of our writing contests, that all pieces submitted will be featured in the BWO (Beat Without) section of the "big" Beat over several issues. And once all featured, The Beat editors will read and vote on their four favorites. From these reads, our top-vote-getter will receive a one-hundred-dollar money order. Our second place winner will get a fifty-dollar money order. And our third and fourth place winners will receive twenty-five-dollar money orders. Good luck writers!

This issue goes to finding peace! See you next week.

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Special Volunteer: Nancy DeMartini

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

Beat Supporters: The Beat Within greatefully acknowledges the generous support of funders of Pacific News Service's Youth Communications Programs–California Arts Council, California Wellness Foundation, Christensen Fund, Community Foundation of Silicon Valley, Community Technology Foundation of California, Compton Foundation, Creative Work Fund, Cricket Island Foundation, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Ford Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Marin Community Foundation, Morris Stulsaft Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, Open Society Institute, Peninsula Community Foundation, Philanthropic Ventures Foundation, S. H. Cowell Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco Foundation, Shinnyo-en Foundation, W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation, Stone Circles Foundation, Stuart Foundation, Surdna Foundation, The California Endowment, Tides Foundation, Van Loben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation, Vanguard Public Foundation, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Youth Justice Funding Collaborative, the Zellerbach Family Fund and individual donors.

Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

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From The Beat: We want to thank poetry teacher and friend Judy, who teaches a writing and poetry class with the young women at Central Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles County. Judy reached out to us and we are so grateful that she has, given we have a new found access to Central as well. We are so excited to include Shadow and Vanessa's, two or her students voices, in this week's Beat. We know this is not the last time you readers will hear from them, even though they do not take on our topics, it's all good. WE are just honored that that have this courage to share. Thank you again!

Intro

Poetry from girls in Central Juvenile Hall focus on their struggle with being locked up; while at the same time yearning for connection and love from their family and friends.

-Judy

Beat Within

I have a beat within
hidden deep inside of me,
I have a beat within
that they can't take away from me.
For they are filled with hate,
for everything and me.
They are filled with hate,
so my beat they cannot see.
All they think of is anger,
because all they see is pain.
I try to show them kindness,
but my efforts are in vain.
For no matter what I try,
they still think of anger
and for their pain I cry.
Because I have a Beat Within,
so hope is all I see,
I have a Beat Within,
that they cannot take from me.

-Vanessa

I lost one of my homies,
he was like a brother to me,
but now he is gone

Being Locked Up

Being locked up it's not the first time.
Being in juvey I broke down and cried.
I lost one of my homies,
he was like a brother to me, but now he is gone-
and it's up to me to keep him in my memory,
to to keep him in my heart,
and I have to remember that he's always there.
I have to remember that we won't be apart for a long time,
because the day will come when we're together in
heaven or hell, but I still have to wait for sometime.

-Shadow

Best Friend

If I have to be your best friend,
If that's all I can get.
I'll take the job with honor-
I'll be the best one yet.

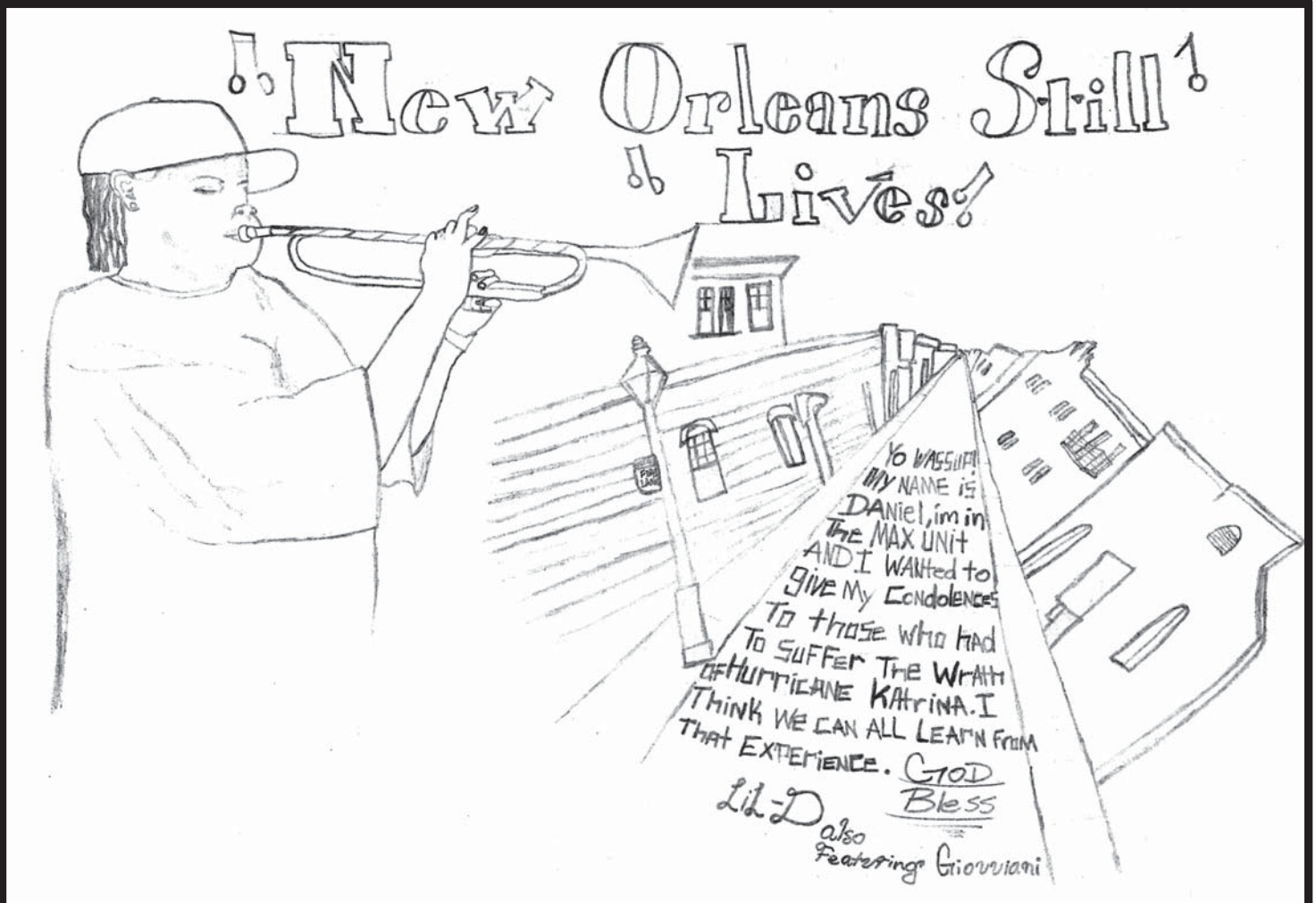
I'll offer you my shoulder,
I'll show you how much I care.
I'll be there when you need me,
I'm not going anywhere.

If I have to be your best friend,
the one who hears you cry.
I'll take the job with honor,
I'll take the job with pride.

My love for your is stronger
than you will ever know,
but for you to ever love me,
I will have to let you go.

You need time to find your purpose,
you need time to sort your thoughts,
but when the course has ended,
and the race is finally run.
Remember it's your best friend
who has loved from day one.

-Shadow


"New Orleans Still Lives!"
Yo WASSUP! MY NAME IS DANiel, im in The MAX UNit AND I WANted to give My Condolences To those who had To SUFFer The WrAth of Hurricane KAtrina. I Think WE CAN ALL LEArN From That EXPERIENCE. GOD Bless
Lil-D also Featuring Giovviani

From The Beat: The following voices are the writings that we picked up from our initial visit to Central Juvenile Hall in Lost Angeles, on Saturday 09-09-06. These contributors found time in our hour plus session to write the following. Thanks again goes to our friend, Michael Arrington, who has opened the door for The Beat Within!

Being A Man

I really don't feel like writing, because everybody that tries to talk to you in jail, tells you to change or become a better person. Even though I've already changed I'm still locked up. The more I change the harder it gets to do the right thing, and the more people try to tempt you. So it seems to me you can change in your room but when you come out for rec the people around you force you to act as you used to.

I think it's some crap because the judge doesn't know you or talk to you to see if you've changed. He just looks at paperwork and sees how bad you are. So to me it seems you have to make a choice, be a punk or be a rider. That's up to me, but I'm gonna make my own category called "being a man.' And that's what I'm gonna be.

-Kevin

From The Beat: Excellent piece Kevin! So many of our readers can relate to your thoughts too, and all we want to add is that it is your life and we hope that you continue to make the right choices that will benefit you and those who love you. The Beat Within, is not about telling you to better your life, but to give you the outlet/forum to tell your story and maybe in the end you will make a wiser decision that will change your old ways, if not, well... your choice! We also hope that people like your judge, your PO, your family will get a glimpse of The Beat Within, because The Beat Within is an honest window into your world, and is not a bunch of numbers and statements written by some policy maker. The Beat is your voice, your reality. All we ask is you keep it respectful and real for all to embrace!

Sometimes

Sometimes I feel like
I can't stand it no longer
But the love from my family
makes me stronger.
Everyday and night I can't help it
But I wanna fight,
sometimes I be knocking
On the walls of juvenile hall
Asking for a head call.
I don't know why but sometimes I wanna die.

-Luis

From The Beat: We have no idea of what you have seen and experienced in your young life. We bet it weighs on you. You are fortunate you have a loving family, that wants you home, that no longer wants to see you incarcerated. Your family wants to see you happy. They want you in school, to have a legit paying job, and mostly to stay away from the negativity of your old ways. Now is the time to pull yourself up, and if you can't, then ask for help! Do not let pride get in the way, ask to talk to someone you trust! Ask! Now is the time to get your thinking cap on and start absorbing the knowledge and moving beyond simply chilling and doing dumb shhh! Rise up!

To Many questions

Why?
Love or hate?
Do I wanna fight
To live another night
Or get high until my eyes would bleed,
But that is just my greed

-Luis

From The Beat: Through out life we will have to answer to "too many questions." It is in your best interest to think things through and not just shoot from the hip when responding to any question coming your way. If you use your head, we bet in the end you won't find yourself in such a predicament. Think about love and hate! Think about the consequences of fighting! Think about the consequences of getting high and having greed! Think about where some of your choices have taken you. Enough.

The more I change the harder it gets to do the right thing

I Care About Writing

Well first off let me start off by saying I'm seventeen years old. I'm from Long Beach. I started gang banging when I was a very young teen. At first I didn't really relate to nobody. I really didn't care about nothing much. I was really hard headed.

My first charge was attempted murder against a rival gang member down in Long Beach and I got caught up for it. But the thing that was really keeping me from blowing it was writing. Really being able to express my feeling without being criticized about what I do, so maybe I just might be interested.

-Merritt

From The Beat: Thanks for taking a few minutes to introduce yourself to The Beat Within. Well Merritt, we hope this is not the last time we hear from you. We would be honored to hear your thoughts, read your stories etc. In The Beat's eyes, from your life experiences, you are a teacher to us readers. It is not our intention to tell you how to live your life, 'cause in the end it is you who must make the choices that you think are best for you. We simply want to say is that we hope with your skills and desire to write that one day you will have that opportunity to write in the free world, say in the school house, until then, we encourage you to write and read and share with The Beat Within! WE can only hope that a reader or two will be touched by your work to take a better look at themselves and see that this incarceration road is one long dark tunnel.

Overcome The Struggle

Pops sold drugs, mama sold drugs
Had my mind all twisted all I wanted was a hug
Moms got straight, my father didn't bother
In and out the state pen, true colors of a coward
My brother died at twenty, only human that I trusted
Couldn't take it, grabbed me a nine started bustin'
Am I a role model, some say I am
I got dreams, had to get 'em out the trash can
Now I'm eighteen, lookin' at time in the pen
Found my true gift, it resides in a pen
It's The Beat Within that makes my heart grin
No more hollow tips, I'm a writing marksmen
Representing my hood, and all my brothers and my sisters
This system that we in, only tries to make us sicker
But I'm overcome the struggle, and beat all the odds
I refuse to be another brother with his life robbed

-Remone The Black Souljah

From The Beat: Whew, heat is what you deliver in this hard-hitting tease of a poem. From the opening line you have us readers hooked too. You are no joke when it comes to sharing your gifts through the pen(cil). Your life hasn't been easy, given the negativity was right in front of you as a child, and look where it has taken you! Such ashame, but it is you Remone who can break the cycle! It is you Remone who through your pen(cil) can wake up others to see how mighty powerful you are with your thoughts and your courage to tell your story. We definitely hope this is not the last time we hear from you. We're counting on you now to teach us readers and help break the stereotypes that are so easily placed on too many young people.

Big Regret

Well, I just want to say that I regret getting in to my gang man! If I could just go way back and make the right choice.

Yeah right now, I just feel really bad because I've been in and out of Central Juvenile Hall. But this time it's quite bad, because even though I was doing so good in school, just one night may have messed up my whole life. Right now I'm really stressing because of my baby girl Brandy, my daughter man.

I just hope that I get one more chance. I hope I don't get tried as an adult because I really wanted to go to the army for my own good.

-Ricardo

From The Beat: We all wake up and see the light at different times. This time sounds to us like it is your wake up call. Tragically it takes such a case. We too hope it is not too late for you. You totally see where things went wrong. Besides enlisting into the army, what other plans do you have for yourself if you are given another chance? If you must do time, we hope you use your time wisely. We hope you can be your own man and stand up and say how you feel to whomever wants to keep you down. We hope you will continue to write and obtain all the knowledge and wisdom as possible, so when your date for freedom arrives you will be equip! You are right it takes one bad turn, those few dark seconds and your whole life can be turned upside down. When did you realize this? Did you know this going into this night? Well, what's done is done, now it should be your mission to change your life for the better, so your baby girl knows her daddy loves her from the bottom of his heart and is going to step up and change no matter what anyone thinks!

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Wars Of My Life

in this world we live with all kinds of war
nothing but hate all the way to the core
some people quit some just want more
some people keep knockin' on deaths door
right now i'm at war with myself
why do shhh that messes with my health
i'm at war just tryin' to be free
some days it get hard this shhh i can't believe
my real emotions i just can't relieve
hate is all i perceive
i'm in a war that can't end in peace
a war in these streets with so many deceased
a war with my family to make them happy for a change
but change just seems so out of my range
funeral after funeral man i can't take it
so i just put a smile on my face and fake it
go to war every night with the demons in my head
all the voices shouting won't let me go to bed
but when i rest that's when i feel complete
and for the night the wars end in their defeat

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Now here's the trick: Take that same state of mental rest and make it stick when you're awake and doing your best. Keep your effort yoked to the task of changing for the better, but let your mind rest without reaching for the fruit of your labor. Make it a sacrifice to God, or penance for the sadness you brought your family, without looking toward any future reality, without reaching for any future result. When you've learned to labor in peace, your mind will exult in a war totally spiritual. Your heart will feel at ease, fulfilled in the effort you continually make. And when you least expect it, the fruit of your labor will suddenly come your way. That change that seemed so out of range will have come to be your new reality — that better day in which you live and breathe spiritually, mentally and physically free! Just do the inner work day by day, patiently.

No Place Like The Hood

there's no place like the hood
where it is all good
hanging out on the block
listenin' to different experiences
old people showing you and telling you
and the girls that be dime pieces
that just come to the hood so they can talk to you
there's no place like the hood
there i know i am home
when i hear my music playing
i see block names written in graffiti on
my neighborhood bart station
the corner store where i hanging
and lil' kids come buy candies before going to school
there's no place like the hood
where my peoples are full of pride
being the best in everything
being the best dancer the best singer the best rapper
the best-dressed or simply the most beautiful
there's no place like the hood
where violence is common in the hood and the fears
of guns of drugs of poverty that's destroys many innocent lives
there's no place like the hood
where mama daddy and the people struggle every day
and i can be me

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It brings a lump to the throat, thinking about how much you must miss your 'hood, where you can freely be yourself. But now, you will be back there and if you want to stay there, you'll need to see how to be yourself without getting caught up in the guns and drugs — and we know you want to escape poverty, so you'll need to get a straight job, suit up and show up everyday to make your money the safe and legal way. With that said, nothing could be better than for you to be yourself, outshining the sun in the best of weather.

How

how can i love someone
without a heart
how can something end
if it never does start
how can i feel pain love hurt
if i have no emotions
i am nothing but a little fish in this vast wide ocean
how can i see when i have no sight
how can i be a warrior when i don't have the will to fight
how can i want something when i have no desire
i've grown cold in this world without a fire
how can i be locked up
when i was never really free
i never really knew myself
so how can i be me
how can i become something when i have no life
i wouldn't be in this predicament if i didn't have a knife
how can i miss someone who really wasn't here
my goals seem so far away now
but they were never really near
how can i be around so many but feel so all alone
how can i consider this place a temporary home
i feel like a cat with nine lives
but already wasted eight
maybe prison life was my fate
but why would i be destined to fail
i'm so young
my life still has a chance to sail
how could i change
when i didn't know what was wrong
how could i put myself in jail for so long
i am at the edge of the world
and i'm ready to dive
how can i die
if i was never alive

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Are you getting tired of us telling you how powerful your words are? There's both the raw truth of what you have to say, the truth that so many others prefer to try to hide away not only from others but from themselves as well — and then there's that way that only you can tell it, in lyrics that make a reader's heart live, breathe and smell it! Have you ever heard the zen koan (spiritual riddle, puzzle, put by masters to students under their tutelage, on the path to wisdom aka freedom from the distorting influence of fear or any sort of expectation — finding freedom in the lightning/enlightening action they're taking): You are standing at the tip-top of a fifty-foot pole. Below you are raging tigers. You cannot stand there much longer. What do you do? The answer is: jump, which is to say, take action! Any master would beat me severely though for saying so. After a thousand years of wisdom writing, they still call words "black beans"; eat them if you're hungry, but otherwise, don't waste any time on them, unless someone else is hungry and asks you for words — then use words to make seekers not only think and feel but see! If by standing "at the edge of the world" ready to jump, you mean jump away from everything you've known into the (new) world, unhampered by fear even of death (not to mention more trivial concerns like what the next j-cat might say), then ... you're ready, and the spectral tigers of the mind can't stop you. Love, pain, the fire of desire, and even the tigers will be born again inside you. Let them come and go without surrendering your freedom, which is like that rest at the end of the day (peace of mind) you mention in your other poem published in this issue. Keep putting one foot in front of the other, walking through time.

when i hear my music playing
i see block names written
in graffiti on
my neighborhood bart station

Limn (Parts One and Two)

Part One: I ask myself, in every painful encounter, how can I meet this with enough understanding and love to see the gift being offered to me? Allow me to introduce myself: I'm Rodric aka Lil' Mainy.

Well, people say: How can you protect that while livin' yo' life? Understand this: The day that you lose your soul (which I hope never happens) will be the day you never lived! It may sound stupid at first, but think about it. Look, I'm'a get into some "me time", 'cause, you feel me, The Beat need go-dumb Mainy to go smart one time! It ain't been no spokesmen in The Beat in a minute, not since my brah, Vincent Williams, left the spot.

But yeah, look, I am promised tomorrow because I believe! My mom and the stars have been my dedication. If anybody didn't know already from reading me before in these pages, I been in the system basically since I was born. I'm not gon' go into no sad story or nothing, 'cause it ain't about just me — it's about my people, y'all! So please, I just ask that you keep reading, 'cause I know how it is when you reading this here Beat Within. You skip what you think you don't like, but you'll read a familiar potna or a love poem so you can take it and write yo' dude or female.

I just want y'all to know — don't ever let your feeling do the talking. Trust you, the whole of you, and please, know that somebody care about you, even if they don't know you. Me, personally, I'm sensitive. And I ain't afraid to say that, because I've learned and now I know that a real man ain't afraid of his feelings. So-called weak people are strong and mighty to me because the simple fact that they show real emotions. They show real things and, basically, render those things real.

Strong people nowadays be the ones that try to make the weak weaker, but I mean, some strong people, not all strong people. What I'm saying is, they fight because they believe they could never lose. They shoot because they're bold — shootin' somebody is bold, robbin' somebody is bold, breakin' in somebody's house is bold. If so, why don't we use this boldness and create somethin' worthwhile, something that lasts a life time. You could be that person behind a big desk in a fifteen-story building!

Yes, I'm saying all these bold things is wrong, but if you really just freeze that thought and look at every detail — imagine how that thought could turn out to be in a good way! Look, everybody who do know me, think I'm going to do some long time. No, I'm not. It's only a year. Still, it's fairly certain that I'm staying here until I turn eighteen on in mid-November. Well, that's still time I can't bring back, but it's nothing like eight-and-a-half years of being in and out of group homes, and here! I have no excuses: none. The same song has played out.

I know what I'm'a do though. I notice that dudes still want to give up. They still hate. Look, I wrote three books, right? And Amy the librarian helped me get a publisher. I signed the contract like three days ago, to Urban Books! This lady, named Tiffany Miles, who's a photographer, came and took thirty pictures of me with one of those big o' cameras. Yeah! I was feelin' myself! Giving my model-dude looks (LOL)! Naw. But for real, every dude in max unit start to hatin'!

"Ay yo' back ain't gon' be safe!" And, "You a pretty-boy-ass ninja!" And da-da-da. I mean, yeah, I got boiled! But at the same time, I thought, "Why do ninjas hate so much? Why?" I'm'a get on that subject.

Part Two

Understand me here my fellow … pill-poppin' dudes … I'm me! Always will be me and never will stop being me! All I'm tryin'a do, is be somebody. And my advice is: Find somethin' that will fit you instead of somethin' that's tight. Everybody has a gift, and it's not to be a follower and followin' and followin'. And it's damn sure not to hate, kill, and be someone you're not!

What's your gift? I don't know. All know is livin' and havin' every limb. Some of y'all lost y'all minds wit' them pills! I guess that's yo' excuse. But trust me brah-brah, ain't no excuses. None! Start your plan by starting to plan, and start thinkin' outside the 'hood, the turf, the slumper, and the heart of the soil of the street, 'cause you'll never be remembered. I'm keepin' it real — never! Not by this! And the same goes to the females.

I ain't perfect, but I know. I know for a fact — I'm history. My words, my books, my beat ("got my vans on"), my R-and-B songs, my poetic raps, my message I send and leave with you. All I'm tryin' to say is: Stop hatin', please! If not, then please stop hatin' on me! I know I'm a "pretty boy". I know I got blind-sided and dropped when I was twelve. I know I used the bathroom in my room. I know I'm me.

I notice y'all dues do anything to amuse y'all selves. Look, all I ask is: Do something wit' yourself and stop worryin' about the next man — and stop hatin', please.

Anyways my time is up. Yeah, and for females, I wish y'all the best at whatever y'all do. Yeah, I could be cat but I'm a good one. I'm sayin' that every dude ain't the same; every dude don't wish to be a pimp and have hella work and call his work "bitches". Every dude don't hit females, call out they' name and make babies and leave you. Every dude don't be mad all the time and pop pills and carry guns and sell coke. This here dude know, 'cause I don't do nothin' like that! I'm just a young man stuck in the system. And there's other dudes that ain't the same. I can't speak for them, but I will put that out there.

Yesterday, I made a deal wit' my mama that I stop playin' wit' these girls and be loyal to one. So I made commitment: I'm faithful now. But I started wit' myself! Dat's why us young people ain't faithful toward others, 'cause we ain't faithful towards ourselves. We let little things lead us astray. Anyways, like I was sayin', I'm now faithful and, yes, wit' myself also.

Anyways enough said. Holla atcha kid! Please holla atcha ninja! I'm Lil' Mainy the Prince, and I thank you all for your time. Oh, I would like to say hello to a special few here behind these walls, but The Beat don't print shout-out's no more. I hope y'all know who you are, 'cause I respect y'all 'cause y'all solid — and real recognize real, I suppose. Anyways, I'm through.

Oh, yup: Trust me, y'all gon' be seeing my life story in them theaters, probably next year. This Lil' Mainy. Holla at me!

-Lil' Mainy , 150 Crew

From The Beat: Every so often you put paper to pencil and just don't quit until you say all of it — in an essay format, not, as you put it, "no long sad story" (which is not to say that we would not welcome your writing your story from end to end, if you ever feel you have the time or the inclination to do so, 'cause we would welcome it indeed, just as we did Vincent Williams's story that stretched over many issues). You excel in the format of the extended personal essay certainly as much as you do in your lyrics, and when you write on a subject you touch all the bases and come from all angles. Congratulations on your book contract and photo session. We don't know anything about it other than what you've written here, but it is wonderful to get recognition from others when you give your heart and soul to your work — and that you do! Isn't it a shame how people allow envy or jealousy or whatever (Nietzche called it "resentiment" — that cumulative group resentment or "hate" directed toward any individual perceived to have risen above the crowd in whatever endeavor but most especially of the spirit), to overwhelm their more generous instincts, until they become downright hostile and threatening toward someone who has done them no harm whatsoever? When we see some or one for whom we have genuine affection turn like a snarling dog on another incarcerated youth for whom we care, it is a sad and dispiriting spectacle of the worst in each of us, however trivial the circumstance or empty the threat. No one benefits because it poisons the atmosphere for all concerned, and sooner or later each gets what he gives. The strategy of victimizing another to avoid being victimized oneself, always ultimately fails the so-called strong, who expose another's weakness in a vain attempt to hide one's own terrible fear. In the end, breeding fear yields fearful consequences, as in the Biblical phrase, "Ye reap what ye sow." Your words, on the other hand, plant seeds of wisdom and love.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Like The Rest

i don't whine
like the rest of them
i don't shine
like the rest of them
another line
like the rest of them
i want mine
like the rest of them
    i don't walk
    like the rest of them
    i don't talk
    like the rest of them
    i may not speak
    like the rest of them
    but i'm not weak
    like the rest of them
i'm going to take over the world
like the rest of them
and give it to my baby girl
like the rest of them
    i drop tears
    like the rest of them
    i have fears
    like the rest of them
    i not shear
    like the rest of them
    soon i'll leave here
    like the rest of them
so i can grow up
like the rest of them
so wish me luck
like the rest of them
i don't lie
like the rest of them
i'm not another guy
like the rest of them
    so give me a chance
    like the rest of them
    'cause i'm free lance
    like the rest of them
i won't complain
like the rest of them
or show shame
like the rest of them
to say i'll be happy
like the rest of them
when i start a family
like the rest of them
    so give me a hug
    like the rest of them
    because i need love
    like the best of them

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a beautiful refrain, "like the rest of them" — as you weave yourself in and out of the pattern that typifies "the rest of them". And those special hugs that manifest unconditional love even as "the best of them" guide others through the generosity that flows from inside their hearts and minds out to their families, their children, even their communities and all mankind. You're as tough as the rest, as smart as the best, in need of love as much as the rest — and that's the test, will your neediness become a bridge across which you walk in order to give to others in need, or will it be just another excuse for selfishness and greed like the worst for whom need is a license to make others bleed: making of the need to be loved, a curse?

Unmistakable Death

People dying left and right
Women raped in the wretched night
Children cry and hide under the bed
Hoping they don't catch a bullet to the head
I can't even imagine how they feel
But don't deny what's really real
People scared to go down the street
To get some food so their family can eat
To live in fear with each passing minute
If we have to kill I don't want to win it
Accidents happen, people pass all the time
Two people die every blink of the eye
So why must we fight and take our lives
All he wanted to do was make it home to his wife
Jut because the color of his flesh
Now he's just a photo on his mother's shelf
You can't erase what happened or raise the dead
A kid caught in the crossfire returning home from buying bread
One to the dome, three the chest
Now six feet underground, maggots infest
I've seen so many faces consumed by the torment
Tears mired in the blood's raging current
How come death only is taken seriously
Only when it happens to someone close, like family
Or maybe a friend, but never a stranger
It makes me sick and fills me with anger
One life is as important as anyone else's
Saying it's okay to kill, when our government tells us
War is sick, demented and ugly
Scared that the bullet wants to hug me
Running scared, trying to stay alive
Grenades are thrown and mines they hide
So, when kids are in play, one might die
Just because the mine went undetected
They thought it was a dud and it went detected
So they let it be, they thought it was trash
They never saw their children, 'cause they were blown to ash
Can't you agree that too much blood is shed
Can't we give life and live in peace instead
But can we really put away the weapons
And take advantage of the Bible's lessons
No more tears in any mother's yes
No more muffled father's cries
No man should have to bury their child
Peace will come in a short while

-Mark B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We don't know what you've been caught up in, Mark, that brought you here, but we do know that you show extraordinary insight and wisdom — and that you have extraordinary skills at expressing that wisdom. When you write, "One life is as important as anyone else's," you have captured the message of all the great religious leaders who ever lived, from Jesus to Buddha (which is why we find it so hard to understand all the gangsters who say they believe in and pray to God, while ignoring the most important lessons that the Bible, the Koran, and every other great religious book has to teach). We're not sure how you came to understand these great moral principles when your own peers and national leaders seem to think that only their lives are important, and that God only blesses America and nobody else. But however you achieved your wisdom, just keep passing it on and working toward that vision of a world where all life is seen as the Creator's Creation.

One life is as important as anyone else's
Saying it's okay to kill, when our government tells us
War is sick, demented and ugly
Scared that the bullet wants to hug me

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Rights Belong To Everyone

All people are born to be free. All people are born equal and so have equal rights. People can think for themselves and understand what's going on around them. Everyone should act as brothers and sisters. It doesn't matter what race you are. It doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. It doesn't matter what language you speak, what your religion is, what your political opinions are, what country you come from or who your family is. It doesn't matter whether you're poor or rich. It doesn't matter what art of the world you come from, whether your country is a kingdom or a republic. Our rights and freedom are meant to be enjoyed by everyone:

Everyone has the right to live, the right to be free and personal safety. No one can be someone else's slave;

No one is to be hurt or punished in cruel or humiliating ways;

People cannot be arrested or sent away from their country unless it's for a very serious reason; we have a right to a fair trial;

No person or people shall have their nationality taken away from them; everyone has a right to belong to a nation;

Everyone has the right to own property.

-Grimy B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're a mystery, Barry. You clown around in the workshop and make people laugh, but you come up with these amazing pieces! We're interested in where your ideas of human rights come from. For example, some appear to come directly out of the U.S. Constitution (the right to a fair trial; the right to be free from cruel or unusual punishment). But others are never mentioned in the Constitution (like the right to belong to a nation and maintain your own nationality). Have you studied the United Nations Human Rights Treaties? Well, however you learned about these things, we're very glad you're writing about them. We know that even though there are treaties and laws that say everyone has these rights, many people are still denied them. Have you ever thought about becoming a lawyer specializing in international law so that you could do something to make sure these rights are provided in fact as well as in words? By the way, do you always treat everybody as a brother or sister?

War On Self

For as long as I can remember I have been at war with myself — at war with emotions that control me and my decisions — emotions I don't even understand. All I've ever known is a battle with the consequences of those decisions, decisions that sent me hurtling down the wrong path and sprawling down a black hole of wrong doing and loneliness.

The consequences (loneliness, wrong doing, drug using) feeding into more wrong doing and drug using in an attempt to forget about life for a while and numb the pain of the war a little longer.

Until you can feel pain for what it is you will never grow and move on from the issues that are causing the war inside. Once you accept things for what they are you can move on, learn and grow and stifle the causes of the war for just a little longer.

But keep in mind the war will never end, and we must stay strong and always fight the evil inside.

-Cherry B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Wow, you really made some good points in this piece. We're sure you're not alone and a lot of people will feel this piece. We believe each and every one of us has a war going on inside of us. Some are just more violent than others — or, perhaps another way to say it, some are just unwilling to face the causes of their pain. What keeps you equipped to fight the evil inside? How did you come to see things so clearly, both your past and your future? How would you teach others to fight the evil inside them, and to allow themselves to feel what we all try to push aside?

When Will We Learn

Bang, bang, bang... "Wake up it's hygiene time." I get up still half asleep, find the bag with my name on it and brush my teeth. Back in my room until breakfast time — even breakfast isn't worth looking forward to — nasty juice, weak-ass cereal, and some watery-ass milk. You eat it all and wish you had more.

Back to your room to wait for school. School is worthless because you learned all this in second grade. After four hours of school back to your room to wait for lunch. Same ol' shhh and you're waiting for dinner, an apple for snack, the movie get cut off... and back to your room, to do it over again tomorrow.

When will we learn this life gets us nowhere, this life teaches us nothing? When will we learn how to stay out of the system, and to do what we know is right? Why is it so hard to just go back to school and find an honest job? Why is it so hard to stop using drugs and show your family you care? When will we learn how to stay out of the streets? When will we learn to do right for each other? When will we learn EDUCATION IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER?

-Cherry B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is an outstanding piece, from how you explain the monotonous life in juvenile hall to the way you conclude with all those great questions. Have you thought about what it is you want to do when you get out? Do you want to finish school? Do you plan on going to college? What do you want to study? Maybe we're getting ahead of ourselves... What do you want to do on your first day out?

A Gangster's Prayer

Heavenly Father, please hear me tonight,
I need so much guidance to live my life right
Sometimes the pressure is so hard to bear,
I often wonder if anyone cares,
How can I wake up and face each new day,
Knowing I have to live my life this crazy way?
Heavenly Father, forgive all my sins,
I want to change, but where do I begin?
Help me resist the wild life I desire,
Give me the strength to stay away from the mighty gunfire.
Please God, bless my family whose eyes silently plead,
For me to go out as they all watch me leave,
God bless my mother who cries every night,
Worrying I'll be killed in yet another gang fight.
Heavenly Father, please answer my prayer,
Let me know if you're listening up there.
When will it end? What's it all for?
To prove to my homies, yeah, I'm down, I'm hard core?
Sometimes I wonder how will I die,
By a bullet wound in my chest or knife in my side.
Heavenly Father, please hear me tonight,
Give me the courage and strength to live life right.
Show me the way, God show me the light,
Help give my heart peace so I don't have to fight.
Thank you for your forgiveness Lord and for always being there,
And most of all, thank you for listening to this gangster's prayer.
Amen

-Sleepy B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It saddens us to know that people feel trapped in the gang lifestyle. It's such a hard place to be because you know you probably don't want to do it forever, but don't want to turn your back on your homeboys. Do you think you'll be involved with gangs for the rest of your life? If so, are you ready to suffer the consequences that come with that lifestyle? If not, when and how do you see yourself stopping? Can your faith in God help you through this dilemma?

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Lo Que Mas Me Dolio y Me Duele

Me duele la vida que llebo y todo lo que hice. Me duele hablar con mi familia porque les causé mucho daño. Me duele pensar en mi hermano porque esta muerto al igual que mi madre, pero no hay nada que puedo hacer.

Me dulele escirbir lo que escribo. Me dule ver a todas las personas que vienen a los USA tratando de vivir mejor.

Hay muchas personas que nos descriminar y piensan que somos personas estupidas que solamente venimos a molestar a su pais. Si ellos hubieran nacido en nuestros paises, pensaran diferente. Pero la vida es asi, talvez yo mismo pensara asi si hubiera nacido aqui.

Gracia a Dios no pienso de así talvez porque no naci aqui. Todo esto me daña hasta el alma. Asi tiene que ser. Siempre tienen que haber personas con mucho más dinero que otros, personas más grandes que otras y nuestra vidas siguen. Me duele no poder ayudar a cientos de familias pobres que nesesitan un pan, un poco de arroz o un poco de arina para poderse sostener vivos. Todo eso me duele.

From the Beat: Que corazón tan noble. Si en el mundo hubieran personas como tú, todo fuera diferente. Serían gente que amaran a los demás no importando del color, situación económica que se encuentren y de donde vengan. Gracias a Dios te puso en este mundo para darnos estas palabras verdaderas. Se siente que eres una persona que puedes ser un líder, ayudar a muchas gente necesitada. Esperamos que triunfes en la vida para que puedas ayudar a quellos que esten a tu alcance. ¿Qué crees que ayudaría a terminar toda esta corrupción? ¿Si todos pusieramos un granito de arena, crees que este mundo cambiaría de peor a mejor? ¿Que es lo que este mundo necesita para cambiar? Sentimos mucho tu perdida. Debe ser dura vivir sin las personas que mas quiere. No deje que este te detenga en tu camino.

What Hurt Me The Most And It Hurts Me

The life that I lead and everything I have done hurts me. It hurts me to speak with my family because I caused them lots of harm. It hurts me to think about my brother because he is dead, and the same goes for my mother, but there's nothing I can do.

It hurts me to write what I am writing. It hurts me to see all the people that come to the U.S. trying to live a better life.

There are many people that discriminate against us and think we are stupid people that only come to their country to bug them. If they would have been born in our countries, they would have thought differently, but life is like that. Maybe I myself would have thought like this if I would have been born in this country.

Thanks to God, I don't think like this, maybe because I wasn't born here. All of this hurts me to my soul. That's how it should be. There always has to be people with much more money than others, people who are bigger than others, and our lives continue. It hurts me to not be able to help out hundreds of poor families that need a piece of bread, a little bit of rice, or a bit of flour in order to sustain themselves and keep themselves alive. All of that hurts me.

-Cruz, Marin

From The Beat: What a noble heart! If the world were full of more people like you, everything would be different. It would be full of people who love others regardless of the color of their skin, their economic standing, or where they come from. Thanks to God, He placed you in this world to give us these true words. We can tell that you are a person that's capable of being a leader and help out many people in need. We hope you triumph in life so you can help out those who are within your reach. What do you think would help eliminate all this corruption? If we all placed a grain of sand, do you believe this world would change from worse to better? What do you think this world needs in order to change? We deeply regret to hear about your loss. It must be hard to live without the people whom you love the most. Don't allow this to hold you back in life.

Yo Puedo Amar Mas Que Odiar

Sabes Beat yo pienso que odiar a alguna persona sin conocerla pienso que eso puese pasar. Como ustedes saben, cada persona tiene diferentes pensamientos, pero no communes. Muchas persona hablan mal de otras personas cuando hablan mal de ellos y es ahí donde empiezan a odiar a las personas que no conocen.

Una cosa es seguro que para mí es mas facil amar a una pesona que odiarla aunque no la conozca. Por ejemplo, yo amo a mis hijos aunque no los conozoco porque todavia no han nacido.

Recuerdo cuando mi mama estaba viva, me dio todo su amor y cariño. Ella me dijo que me amaba desde que estaba en su estomago. Bueno no me dijo exacto eso pero yo y ella supimos que me amaba desde ese entonces.

Ahora estoy preso pero dentro de muy poco talvez, entre cinco años, voy a hacer un profesional en computación porque me gusta. Eso es lo que le pido a Dios.

Mi papa se vino para Virginia. No lo he visto desde que 4 años hasta ahora que ya tengo casi 18. Solamente lo he visto por fotos y hablo con el por telefono. Es como si no lo conociera porque no es lo mismo expresarse por telefono que frente a frente.

From the Beat: Que expresion tan linda. Sabemos lo de tu madre, y sabemos que este donde esté ella esta orgulloso de ti, no por los errores que has cometido sino por el corazón tan grande que tienes. Computación da mucho dinero, no dejes que los errores que estas cometiendo destruyan tus metas. Esperamos que llegues a conocer a tu padre y te ayude a salir de la situación en la que estas. Tenemos un sentimiento grande que lucharas y que venceras, que seras esa persona que quieres ser. Lo único que tienes que hacer es pensar positivamente como lo estas haciendo. Mucha suerte Cruz.

I Can Love More Than I Can Hate

You know what Beat? I think that it is not possible to hate someone without even knowing that person. Like y'all already know, each and every person thinks differently, but not the same. Many people talk bad about other people, and when they talk bad about other people, that's when someone can develop hatred for people they don't know.

One thing is for certain, for me, it's easier to love a person than to hate them, even though I might not know that person. For example: I love my kids, even though I don't know them because they haven't been born yet.

I remember during the time that my mom was alive, she gave me all of her love and affection. She told me that she loved me ever since the moment she knew I was in her belly. Well, she didn't tell me exactly this, but I and she knew that she loved me ever since that moment. Now I am locked up, but in a little bit, maybe within five years, I am going to be a professional in computers because I like computers. That is what I ask from God.

My father left for Virginia. I haven't seen him for four years until now that I am almost 18. I have only seen him in photos and speak with him over the telephone. It is like I don't even know him because it is not the same expressing yourself over phone compared to face to face.

-Cruz, Marin

From The Beat: What a beautiful expression. We know what you mean regarding your mother's love, and we know that wherever she may be, she is proud of you, not because of the mistakes you have made, but rather for the enormous heart that you have. Being a computer whiz brings in lots of money. Don't allow for the mistakes that you have made to destroy your goals. We hope that you end up getting the chance to get to know your father and for him to help you get out of the situation you find yourself in. We have a strong feeling that you will fight and you will win and that you will become the person that you want to be. The only thing you have to do is to think positively like you are doing right now. Good luck to you, Cruz.

it is not the same expressing yourself over phone compared to face to face

Cheating — Part Four

It's early morning and the telephone rings. I answer with a voice still heavy with sleep, "Hello?"

"What's up, J-T?" came the sound of a girl's voice over the line.

"Why are you calling me so early?"

"Because —"

"Because nothing, Bye." The phone line clicks off. J-T hangs up and says to himself out loud, "This girl is out her damn mind!" Thinking through his day, he says to himself at last, "I guess I'll just go to the movies tonight."

Again the telephone rings. "Hello."

"It's me."

"What the freak you want?"

"Just wanted to see —"

"See nothing! Bye." I waited till about quarter to nine to leave my house that night, and once I got to the movies, it was almost nine thirty. So I brought my ticket, and when I turned around, I couldn't believe my eyes!

"Hey, J-T!"

There she was! "Oh, what's up?"

"Can I speak to you for a few minutes?"

"About what?"

"Can I —"

"We can talk right here

"Why are you looking like that?"

"Why are you with this weak ninja that you cheated on me with?"

"Stop it!"

"Naw! Forget this ninja and forget you! You talk all this shhh about me being with you, and then you go behind my back and —"

"But you said we should see other people," she said, cutting me off.

"But I didn't think you was gonna do it."

Now the man she's with says, "Baby, let's jus' go."

"Ninja, who is you?"

And the man says, "Youngsta you don't know me."

"Ninja! You don't wanna see me!"

"Y'all stop," the girl says, stepping between us and looking me in the face.

"Forget you and take your weak self home!" I say.

"Cousin —" the man starts to say.

"Ninja! Cousin nothing! You better get the freak out my face before I —," I stop myself. "You know what? You are a waste of my time, ninja."

"Whatev —," the other man began to say but was cut off with a slap by baby-girl who turned and walked away.

So I turned and walked away, too, got into my car to go home. "Man, was my night messed up," I said to myself as I started the long drive back. As soon as I close the car door, there's the sound of the phone ringing. "What the freak she want? I'll just let it ring," I say, thinking out loud. Ring! Ring! Ring! I don't answer it.

But once I got home, I seen somebody sitting on my stairs — and it's her. I walk closer and she looks up at me with tears in her eyes. "J-T, J-T, I'm sorry!"

"Don't. Stop crying now," I say, "because you know what you did. And now you wanna show up at my house with this bull?"

"I'm sorry."

"I've had enough for one night. So go home and get the freak off my doorstep," I say quietly bur firmly. But she just sits there crying. Then she reaches up to grab hold of me. "Get off of me!"

"Hug me," she whimpers.

"No."

"Please?"

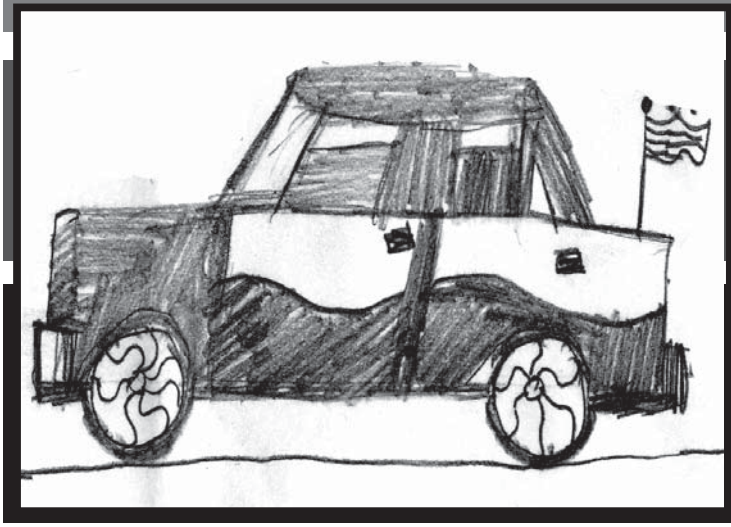
I opened the door to my house door and before I could close it, she rush in! "Get out!" I shout at her.

"No."

It took a while, but I finally got her out. I said, "Let's go outside and talk." Then, once we got outside, she said about two more words before I slammed the door in her face! And when I looked out the peephole, I saw her standing there, crying.

-Lil' Jt, 15o Crew

From The Beat: It really looked like you were writing a short story this time and not just a dialogue, though to be sure it's a story with a lot of dialogue in it. So, we laid it out like a story, which better allows for the other parts of your narration to hold their place on the page. (An alternative is to lay it out like a play or movie script, if you prefer.) Really, adding other narrative elements, like getting into your car, seeing her on your doorstep, etc., do enrich your writing beyond the spare yet economical dialogue format you've used in the past. For example, it allows that last sentence to clinch the story, though it's "spoken" by the narrator (JT) and not the character (JT) — like when you're telling a story about what you did yesterday, the story-teller (in the present moment of story-telling) is the narrator, and the person yesterday about whom the story is being told is the story's main character or protagonist aka "hero". Of course, a protagonist doesn't have to be a hero at all; does JT look heroic peering out through the peephole at the girl crying? It depends on where the reader's sympathy lies, or, perhaps, the author's. Who has ownership of the "meaning" of the story, the reader or the author? Can the meaning change for the author as it may for a reader? Hmmm. (Now there are three JT's: author, narrator, protagonist — maybe even four: reader.)



What Makes My Smile Disappear?

When I'm in a good mood everyone is happy
because for me, I'm never happy because of my life.
I spent all my life in the system with strangers
because my family couldn't take care of me.
Ever since that started I've never ever been happy.
Besides me being in the system, I spent a lot of my life in juvie.
I've always been in and out of the system
because I choose to hang out with the wrong crowd.
And that crowd always made wrong decisions.
Since I've started talkin' wit' my aunt and uncle, it's been good for me. They even wanted me to move in wit' them, so I did.
I am happy being wit' my family especially my lil sister.
I hope she doesn't fall in the hole
I fell in wit' two of my brothers.
My aunt even tried to adopt my patna,
but she didn't wanna follow the rules so she had to go.
I was happy wit' my family since my patna was gon',
'cause I had started making bad choices.
But since she's gon' I'm still making bad decisions.
And now that I'm kicked out,
in juvi and on my way back to the system, and back in the group home, now my smile is a frown.

-Nay-Nay , 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a tremendous and honest effort you drop on us readers. Thanks! Now, why do you think that even though you were happy to be with your family you went back to making those bad decisions and breaking the rules? Will you do differently if you have another chance?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

The Getaway

I think about this every day. Our ticket out is college. College is coming soon. This year I'm going to the twelfth grade. I get out on Valentine's Day, 2007. We gonna go straight to the school house to get enrolled back into our old school. This education is all we need to get by…We have it all planned out, to completely turn away from our old life.

We have big dreams. By 2008, I plan to be enrolled in college, 'cause this ain't the life for me. Me and my girlfriend, we want a lot of things in our future. We won't let anything stop us from getting them. If college is the way we see that best fits us in our new life after returning to society, then that's what it's gonna be. Selling drugs is always an option, but we wanna do it the hard way…so our siblings can be proud of us. It's to show them the right way.

Also to prove to ourselves that we can go to college and do whatever we want—that there's more outside of California. She's never been out of the Bay Area. I wanna take her everywhere I've been and explore the places we haven't been together! Show everyone that the love between us that was so strongly doubted was the strength of the couple that could do anything together.

-Slim Jim LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Great vision. We wish you the best. Your lady and you seem to have thought things through. It's interesting that you write that selling drugs is the easy way to make money. Why is that? Regardless, we hope you never ever resort back to that ol' lifestyle, knowing now exactly what is at stake!

Lying Clean

hush
to a closed mind
if opened is a disaster
to all mankind
but the disaster
to all mankind
is a closed mind
unwilling to accept
or find
truth
please be told
so conscience
can breathe
and guilt can leave
so we all can
someday see
clear and clean
once more again
just like
the day we're born
without sin
or our heart's torn
because nothing we know
between good and bad
now nothing we show
for the life we live
except for your kids
that half of us
ain't even there for
because the father
or mother
we never really cared for
it was just a thing
at the time
because he spit a good line
because she was looking like
a dime
now time after time
your hurt heart broken
even though us guys don't
show it
but twenty-four/seven we know
it
so we hide it
and hope to be guided
to a new life
to a new love

-Jacob, 15 OCrew

From The Beat: The most important one to tell the truth to, for each of us, is oneself, 'cause if we keep truth up on a shelf, we're condemning ourselves to the hell of repeating the same mistakes again and again. Guilt and shame multiply because we hold the truth within, disguise it with a grin directed not at the others, but get over on our sisters and brothers with a wink and nod and a quick prayer to God, tell ourselves we'll be forgiven for the life that we're livin'. Believing our own lies, we hide from the truth hidden deep inside. Yeah, facing it can be tough and the going can get rough, but there's light at the end, true forgiveness of sin and a genuine chance to begin again, to live that new life, to find that new love and do it right.

My Life

Sometimes I hate my life 'cause of the things that is going on in my life. I'm in CPS and my baby in CPS. I'm trying to get him out and tryin' to do what I need to do. It is hard tryin' to take care of my self and my baby and the one on the way. They daddy aint there. Being a mother that is only 16 going on 17, doing by my self is hard. My B-day is 9-15-06. To only be 17 and just knowing the streets. I trying to get my life together and that is what I'm going to do when I get out; that's what I should do.

-Diamond D, 150 crew

From The Beat: You're still so young but have so much responsibility with a baby and one on the way. It must be hard to come to terms with that, but your kids are depending on you to be strong and to do what's right. Look for positive supportive help wherever you can and most definitely stay off the streets. Good luck, we're rooting for you. Happy birthday!

Yes I Can Hate Someone I Don't Know

Yes, I can. I hate my dad because he left me hanging at the age of two. Now I'm almost seventeen. This will be my third birthday being locked up. I know it's my fault, but just thinking back at all my birthdays on the outs – he could have been there for me and my older brother. But he wasn't. So yes – I can hate someone I don't know – my dad.

-Diego, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Do you see any possibility of your feelings changing, in regard to your dad? What would it take on his part, and on your part, to develop a relationship?

Crazy Love

Roses are red but my thoughts are black,
Just thinking about when you turned your back.
I told you I loved you and I was serious.
When we broke up, I was furious.
I couldn't believe it, but I stayed strong,
Then I thought about it and I really was wrong.
So I didn't trip gotta keep it deep,
Later that night you end up calling me.
I didn't know who you were 'cause I thought you were gone.
I must have been just way too on.
I didn't want to talk to you I was too high.
When I said that you started to cry.
We got back together and always kissed.
The next couple weeks we were both pissed.
It was the same - just arguing - so you left again.
Then you weren't my friend.
Then the next day I went to the hall and got out in two weeks
I called, we talked a little and we were supposed to meet.
Then I came back and that's where I really messed up.
Now I'm still here and I called you two times.
I wrote you a letter and I'm waitin' for mine.
I hope I get it, I'm in love you see.
I don't know how or why 'cause I'm straight up G.
Gangstas don't love unless you down to ride.
Lil' mama that's why I made you mine!
I'm goin' to sit here thinking and continue to write.
When I'm free I promise we won't never fight.
Even when you call me crazy and talk a lot of shhh,
Girl I swear I'll never call you a witch.
I missed you too much to really be mad,
All these days I really been sad.
That is until we talked, it lit up my day.
To all my folks this is what I got to say:
It don't make you a mark to fall in love
But it has too be the right one.
I would of never thought I got you back.

-Shagy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: So this is a fantastic poem, full of honesty and feeling. We realize that it is not always easy for young men to share their true feelings, especially when it's about love but you are right, no one should be ashamed of how they feel. If you care about someone, you shouldn't feel bad about that. Love is complicated and messy – sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. If for some reason this young lady does not want to work it with you, save your love for someone who wants it.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

RIP Mezzy

What I wanted to erase in my mind is how my real solid pahtna, Mezzy, got killed by a drive-by shooting. He got hit because he was grindin' on the corner and he got caught slipping, not paying attention. I seen him on the ground, just lying there, and he died. I was surprised he was hit. That wasn't like him, being out in the open like that.

Another that I wanted to erase in my mind: My brother, Terence, got out, and then he got caught again for fighting the police. He went down for it, and I don't even really want to talk about it — but I did. (Free my brah.)

My mama's friend got killed because she was hanging out wit' some friends and she got shot by accident. My mom knew her for approximately eighteen years, and every time my mom thinks about it, she gets depressed and cries. She really loved her. Her name was Donna. I miss her, too. I remember when she took me and my brother to Six Flags, and two months later, she got killed. RIP Donna.

-It's Hard, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It is way beyond tragic, these three stories are traumatic. Perhaps it is the close proximity of sudden fatality by gunshot that has you buying into blaming Mezzy for getting "caught slipping" on the grind. Did Donna get caught slipping, too? Just being out in the open cannot be a crime punishable by death, not even in the rule of the game! Truly: blame the game. All three stories come down to the gun-slinging gangster life style and its consequences. Don't be a part of it. Step out and step up. RIP Mezzy, Donna and all the fallen martyrs to an evil game.

Sarah Jane

Little Sarah Jane ran away for home
Thirteen and pregnant
She was all alone
She couldn't run from wrong
And was gonna be sent away
Sarah Jane is just another girl who's dying inside
Yet nobody stops when she cries
They just continue about their day
But, Sarah Jane, go ahead and wipe your eyes
Because we know behind the pain lays a beautiful little girl
There, a girl standing on the corner in the rain
Praying that the storm someday will end
So, instead of walking away open your heart and...
Of course I am here
You don't have to worry
I can see your tear
I'll be there in a hurry when you call
Friends are there to catch you
When you fall
Here's my shoulder
You can lean on me
To all the girls like Sarah Jane
Just know it's not your fault
Be strong
Hold your head up and know
Emalijah, the sun will always come out after it rains.

-Jezebel, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Jezebel, it's a shame to hear the story of Sarah Jane. And what's even worse is – she's not the first. And she won't be the last. She's too young to live life so fast. You are a good friend to give her your shoulder. But, to prevent these mistakes her parents should have told her. It's really a good thing to extend your love out to a friend going through rough times. But, ultimately, we want to prevent these situations from happening in the first place. Set an example for our next generation. They're learning from us. Beautiful writing!

Stop Police, I can't Take It No More

[some lines sampled from Mac Dre]
stop — i can't take it no more
why is the police steady knocking on my door
twenty-four/seven them rollas be trippin'
they said two dudes got shot and i fit the description
but that's drama so save it for ya mama
i'm not a criminal-minded young banga
and i never pulled the trigger
so how can you label me as a killer
on the streets you wrong
tryin' to follow me home
steady runnin' checks on me and my homie
see you got my mother all worried
you got her vision all blurry
and throwing darts at my partner's poster
and he's buried
rest in peace
but they give me no peace
man you evil-minded blinded police
i am not the savage beast
that you label a ruthless member of a g—a—n—g
and all the biggest gangstas be on the o—p—d
they hate to see me drivin' a car i brought
they hate how i talk
i can't spit on the sidewalk
or they hop out they' car and try to harass us
i always said how the laws ain't fair
but they don't even care
i went to jail in my underwear
they always trying to catch somebody
but what's next is you gon' frame somebody

-Fat Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It is a slippery slope, for police who put their lives at risk trying to enforce the laws that exist and arrest the criminal that's to blame even when his crime is selling a nickel of mary jane, 'cause if it's illegal they call it dope — and you must admit the streets are soaked with the blood of young men trying to grind whatever they can in the savage school of the street they "choose" to attend. Yes, the police are human, too; but since you can't change them, you need to change you. And truth to tell, if the street could ever change itself, it could change the police as well. Meanwhile, the situation breeds fear and hate, but that's not a road you can any longer afford to take. So while we feel what you say here, we want to make it perfectly clear — when you point your finger at someone else, three of your fingers are pointing back at yourself. That's where the work must begin, cleaning house within. Then, standing on a platform of positivity, shine your spotlight on scandalous police activity, 'cause in the cat-and-mouse criminal game, it's true that the "innocent" can find themselves framed — but it's not just policing that's to blame. Trying to escape poverty and injustice through a criminal game just turns the wheel one more notch on its cycle of pain.

Drugs, Sex And Violence

For us young boys and girls who experience the life of streets (drugs, sex, violence ect.) seem to be the ones who end up in juvenile hall and prison well at least that's what the statistics say.

From a personal experience I was always told I would never make it or I would be a failure. Damn look at me now, did I listen to them or what I'm in juvi.

I think to myself often sitting in my lil' room, now is the time to change. Before I got myself locked up, many people tried to help me, but as most young boys or girls who experienced the things I've experienced have a hard time trusting people basically letting them in. Now even more people are around me to help even some who I pushed away.

I guess what I'm trying to say to all my streets kids it's ok to get help don't push away the people trying to help, because your friends or family are stuck in a bad life or not leading to success.

If the opportunity comes across for you to better yourself please take so we can prove people wrong show them that even though we come from the ghetto or started living the street life does not mean we can't change. As for me I'm taking that opportunity I will be successful and you can too, just let the right people into your life!!

-Paradise, 150 Crew

From The Beat: From The Beat: Wow! This piece is so well written, and expresses such intelligence and spirit. Thank you for sharing these powerful words with us--we sincerely hope that some of our readers take your words to heart. Well done!

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Speechless, Pray For Me

Part One
beclouded vision
cleared by impairment
that cost my last life
as you broke everything
that was oh so dear to me
you startled me just by your name
and anyone with a heart
can feel my pain
and even if they don't feel it
they see it
if they can't see it
in my voice they hear it
they hear the sorrow
shredding me to pieces
in my eyes
they see the lonely boy
who once felt
an innocent love
that shattered in his face
like glass
and now he's scarred forever
all by his soul mate
as he is chained
to the bottom of a lake
of lost love
as he drowns forever
wishing and hoping
someone will save him
before he dies
or gets eaten alive
living in this much pain
is unbearable
but i do it anyway
because i am a ghost
to a thing called love
because it killed me
so many times
will nobody save me

Part Two
a ghost to the world
or at least that's what i wish
cold and numb with pain
aching slicing down the middle of me
i feel like a living rupture
condemned to be flawed forever
the texture of this emotion
is like the tongue of your heart
against a jagged razor blade
that goes on and on for eternity
and for every inch
gallons of blood pour out
when i think of you
i feel the hundreds of knives
you threw at me all over again
and i think about you
at least a million times a day
your voice as beautiful as it sounds
is like a thousand fingernails
scratching a thousand chalk boards
down the hallway in the back of my mind
you cause a misgiving terror
to the word "love"
as i ask why
why me
why do i have to hurt like this
this poem is not a poem
it's only a tear
compared to the lake of lost love that i cried
i am the broken-hearted boy
who was betrayed and bound
to the bottom of the lake under lock and key
she chained me down
to the dark gallows
when the lake was shin high and shallow
and she wanted me to drown
in my own tears
will someone save me
or should i become a ghost

-Jacob, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We need the magician again, the one found only within the secret heart of each of us. No one else can save you from an inner would so grievous, or if they can you can't wait around to see it. You must save yourself, the key is in your heart. You say in another poem it's like an addiction you can't shake, 'cause a lifelong lack of love is more than you can take. Yet like so many addictions, what you at first loved so much has become a poison to your system, and as such, requires of you yet another mission. The magician in your heart, has held the key from the start. Set him free to do his magic within, and the chains will fall away and you'll start to rise again. Till on a lake so full of salt tears you float on the density. You can even stand up and walk across it as if it were meant to be. It is the past that must become a ghost to you, so that you can move and come through. How is it done? Learn a lesson from the sun each day. Or, if you need more time more time to learn, watch the moon wax and wane like a candle burned that still returns to life, grows large again, luminous with light. Though its cycle every time includes the darkest, moonless night, over time, all again is set right. The magician knows the secret of time, so as you wax and wane, keep writing these fine rhymes.*

**Years later, I haven't just slipped your mind,
I'm non-existent.**

Fall

i got some questions
that keep me remembering
and i still ask
but i wish that i could forget
now what type of autumn
will september bring
will somebody give me a present
but nobody will tell me
just to let you know
this isn't about love
i could never go
beyond or above
i wish i had a spoon
to taste this bowl of perfection
maybe i don't know
the ingredients to put in
but i'm willing to learn it
so the minute i get it right
i'll tell you
but until then
you better find your own clues

-Jacob, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We don't believe you've never gone beyond or above, though you may have indulged yourself in exploring the wound of — ain't got no love. As for that mystical bliss that hovers just beyond reach like an angel's perfect kiss of a flower with a bee dancing on its lip, you've got the spoon. It's your poem's thoughtful tune.*

Forgotten

Years later, I haven't just slipped your mind,
I'm non-existent.
At least maybe a glimpse off the past
which has faded and eroded
over the course of a little less than a century,
and nobody misses me.
Forgotten like homework
erased from a blackboard
in a boring school house.
Disappeared,
cleared away of others' memories,
and returned to the civilized world,
unnoticeable.
Obliviously forgotten!
Wow!

-Mainy Hyena, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** The sad thing is that we are all this way... we pass through the world and we are usually remembered only by a few people, and even those people are forgotten themselves. It's the worst part of mortality. Not only will we die, but our memories die with us. Some people – artists, poets, writers – try to live forever by leaving their works behind. Others hope to live on in their children. Others try to do some big deed, being remembered for crimes, for huge criminal actions. Still others, especially Buddhists -- see themselves as part of everything around them – the air, the leaves, the current of living that passes between us all. Maybe like a raindrop in a river. The drop disappears into something bigger and becomes part of it. In this lovely poem, you posed the problem "I will be forgotten" but now we ask you can you apply your magicians gift with language to writing an answer? How do you cope with this human crisis?*

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Two (me and you) minus
One (you) equals zero (nothing)

seven minutes of your time is all i ask
i was never given love so i'm an addict
to something i never really had
i heard i love you when you said
it was something that they didn't mean
don't tempt a desperate man
because he'll do desperate things
well i'm a desperate man, a hopeless romantic
with all the romance but not a bit
of love at all thrown my way
but i'll move on some day

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You understand the source of that overwhelming force that shakes you to the ground when words of love prove to be no more than meaningless sound. Yet the desperation must be played out in your heart, and it's unfair to start tossing it off like a threat. You're not responsible for how your heart got starved for love and affection, but you are responsible to start the healing by moving in the right direction — model the love you hope to receive some day, unconditional love freely given away. Let desperation be your discipline. Show selfless love till the day you win.

I Had

I had the choice of right or wrong
I have the choice of my future
I had the choice of bad or good
I have the choice to turn my life around or to stay the same
I had the choice to do what I did
I have the choice to apologize for my wrongs.
I had the choice to lie to everyone but didn't
I have the choice to be me
All I am saying is that its all me and I have the choice to do
what I think I should do.
Right or wrong. Bad or Good.
I still have the choice!

-Aaronessa Maricopa/Durango, Arizona

From The Beat: Yes you do have the power to change your life and make positive choices. You are young and you have so many opportunities to make the right choices and succeed.You can choose to hang out with good people. You can choose to finish college. You can choose to be a good friend and a good family member. We have no doubt you will make the right choices and have a great life.

Cops and Robbers

catch me if you can
you'll never take me alive
i won't go there
i'd rather die
you'll never have me
in your system
not now not again
i've been away too long
to be stuck in that again
i have someone here
who loves me
more than you ever could
i did everything for you
even in the rain i stood
for hours soaking wet
i walked to you from
home
only to stand below your
window
with not a kiss blown
your unforgiving
even after all the pain
you caused
you broke our promises
my heart
and all ten of love's laws

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Interesting twist as you begin with a cops-and-robbers reference frame and use that vocabulary to explain spurned love's pain. One-sided love is like being in the hands of a crooked cop, you'd be lucky if all you got was locked up. But as far as "I'd rather die" — better to let it be the one-sided love in your heart that gets buried. Then you make a new start.

I Live In War Every Day

I live in war every day I walk out the house, come out my room, every time I turn on the TV. I feel that's something that's never gone stop. Not saying that it can't be stopped, but no one is really putting in an effort. I see it as long as people keep having babies and when they go be five or six, they just gon' be the next young people to die.

If communities and mothers and fathers help, one day it will come to an end, but I highly doubt it, because war is glorified. War has always been glorified for every thug life. Gangsters is glorified. Most books, movies, videogames, so long as stuff like that is going on, it's never gon' stop.

There are people who are trying to stop this, but last year this time we had 47 murders — now we have 62.

-Marky D B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We agree with so much of your analysis. Yes, war always does seem to be glorified, even from the time we're little children and we want to be like GI Joe or other glamorized warriors. The same principles apply in the war at home. Young people think they will be remembered as fallen soldiers if they give their lives in this war when the sad truth is that almost as soon as they're gone some other child steps into their place. You say that not many people are putting in an effort to stop this war, so what would that effort look like? What should we all be doing to stop it?

No Regrets

This time around I don't regret coming to the hall. When I was on the outs, I was lost and misguided. We all are, whether we like it our not, but some more than others. How so? Well, when I was on the outs I'd do a whole lot of stupid things that didn't only affect me but also my loved ones. I stayed up, popped pills and drank and smoked way too much. I was attending a prep school but I only went up there to smoke and sell. I robbed hella people; I whacked hella houses; and stayed driving a car with no license.

I never got caught for none of these things but I knew my time was coming because I believe in karma. I was livin' for the weekends. I did that for like two months straight because all I wanted to do was get down and that's what we did. I have this girl, who I have talked to since the seventh grade, and until now she cared a lot about me but I was just finding out who I really was and that she was what I really wanted.

I never had a dad or a male role model so I was looking in all the wrong places on how to be a man. You could try to talk to me and I'd be like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I feel you," but really I wouldn't listen. I'd still just do me but I know my limits. I ain't never been shot at or shot at anyone.

Coming to the hall has taught me a lot and put me on the right path to success. I'm in better shape than I have been in a long, long while. I have a plan for myself. I'll share one with you – I'm going to get right with the Lord before I do anything else. I want to prove to myself first that I can be successful and then I'll show my family because they have always been by my side.

Keosha – I want to thank you for being there. I want you to know that I really do love you and always will. You have been a great influence in my life and I plan on marrying you when I/we get where we need to be in life. I know we have already talked about it but I just want you to know – I love you.

-Byrd, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes we get exactly what we need in the strangest of places. People often wonder how coming to the halls can make you a better man or woman but sometimes what we need is to simply be removed from the madness so we can get some perspective and some sanity. This piece is remarkable because it came straight from the heart and any reader can feel your sincerity. It sounds like you have really been reflecting on how you've been living and the kind of life you want to be. You are right – we are lost, trying to make our way to a place that feels right. Along the way, we look to both and good things to get us there. And it sounds like you have some great people there for you and some not so great people. The most important things is that you are on your way and you have found a way to do it on your own terms. Finding faith is essential, and even though faith comes in so many different forms, you just need the one. Hold on tight to your family and loved ones, especially since it is so clear how much they care about you, and never stop believing.

No Fun

Being locked up in no fun.
Runnin' the streets packing big guns.
All my life I did nothing but sin.
Now I'm tryin' to change for the best and I'm tryin' to win.
I love my mom with all my heart.
I hated to look in her eyes and see her hurt.
One day she is gonna see the truth
That I really do care about my youth.

-Tremayne, Maricopa/Durango, Arizona

From The Beat: Tremayne, Best wishes on your quest for a better life. It sounds like you really love your mother and she would be very sad if she lost you. Actions are much stronger than words so we hope you will show her how much you love her by keeping yourself safe and making good choices.

Why Me

Why me? Why do I always get in trouble? I just don't know why. I try to stay out of trouble, but I just can't. I think that if my dad would've never beat me up all the time, then I think that I would've never ever got in trouble in the first place. I think I do what I do is because my dad always hit me, so I would always go out and do bad stuff.

And now I wish I would've never done what I did, because my mom don't need to see me always getting locked up. And I don't want to see my mom get hurt no more. Just because my dad beat me up all the time didn't mean I should've went out and got in trouble. So after all this, I'm going to change my life around, and my mom don't have to go through it no more. Just because I get in trouble I should not let my mom go through it no more because I'm going to change.

-Phoebee GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing with us and your peers your thoughts about the things you went through. Sometimes we know it's hard to share with someone the pain because sharing can mean bringing back memories. But sharing can also help defeat the pain. If your father beat on you, then he has a bigger problem than you do

Living With War

It's war out there on them streets. People are getting killed every day. It's the life style we live. But I'm trying to make it in life. Most people out there warring and don't even know what they in it for. I think most of us are enemies to ourselves.

This war that we in are taking a lot of people out. It seems like that's going to be the way the world gone live. Most people that live in war end up in jail for a life sentences or in a early grave. Some of us live in war even though we ain't in it. It could just be the neighborhood you from and people think you in it.

How I'm feeling right now, I don't want to live in war no more because I'm trying to live, not trying to die, an' that's real talk.

-Lgb B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We're glad that you're no longer content with living in war. But in what ways do you feel like you can keep yourself out of war? If the war is in your neighborhood, how will you stay out of it? Or better yet, how will you learn from the wars you've been in as a way to keep yourself from getting involved with wars in the future? What are the specific changes you plan on making in your life?

Do You See It!

Just to think back when I thought I was a boss dipped in sauce.
Naw naw neva dat. Had to play the role.
Ya girl thought her soul had been sold.
I'm here now to tell you my story 'bout how I'm pulling through.
It ain't the easiest thing in the world, but it ain't the hardest.
I'm gon strive and try and pray every night.
Yes, sometimes I slip up and forget to pray,
but only the Man upstairs can help me through my days.
When I first got to PSK, I said, "Forget all y'all, and I ain't got shhh to say."
I knew I wasn't leaving until my completion day.
I seen many people leave and many people stay,
but I try to make it each and every day.
I met this one girl, she said take it one day at a time
but also use your mind.
I thought she was trippin' but she was speaking from the heart.
She could see the hurt in my eyes
and I told her about my mother's cries.
She try and help me to pull through
but instead I wanna do the foo'.
Look where it got me so far away from home.
My mama, the judge, and my daddy is these group homes.
That's what it says on my paper.
My mama didn't wanna sign her name on that dotted line,
but she knew it was best for me to succeed
and try to make my life a beauty.
And now I'm growing up,
and yes, I'm starting to care.
If I didn't care I would go dumb anywhere,
but I'm a young lady.
I ain't tryna act shady,
'cause karma is a trip and some day is gon come back
and it was just over a sack.
Had to steal her money to get my purp.
Now I regret it because I gon have to go home and watch my back.
If only you could see what my eyes have seen. I try to let it go,
but that's some bs that will continue to grow.
You think no, who cares
till he slapping you and pullin' yo' hair
He don't care.
He will hurt you anywhere.
Girl, love is blind
and please don't let it take over your mind
because you will be fooled.
Then you gon wanna do da foo'
to make that pain go away.
Hit that blunt and the pain will continue to stay.
You can't take away that pain until you talk about it.
It will mess you up forever, and having you really slip.
Baby girl, you thought t was love.
But that man you loved was really pimpin'
Tellin' you it was a one-time thing.
He really fooled you because all the boys is doing they thing.
You got hurt but you are still strong.
Like I said, hold ya own when times get rough.
It's only god you trust.
And I'm sorry what I put you through.
I was just a young girl tryna to do foo'.
To all the young ladies that's getting treated shady,
Keep ya head up and look up towards the sky.
That man is only there to blacken yo' eye.

-Lil' Zillah, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: You sure got a lot into this poem, Lil' Zillah. You've painted a familiar picture of an immature boy who takes advantage of an immature girl. This is one of the oldest stories there is, and we wish we could do something to make girls see that boys too often get socialized to believe that girls are just there to please them, instead of respecting them as they demand respect for themselves. But unfortunately, we all seem to have to learn from our own (often painful) experiences. With that said, we also want to say that not all males are the silly little boys you're used to. Some are respectful, responsible adults who know how to treat others — including females — in a responsible, adult way.

Let's Do It Like We Did Before

If you've got the key
Then I've got the door
Let's do what we did
When we did it before

If you've got the time
I've got the way
Let's do what we did
When we did it all day

You get the glass
I've got the wine
We'll do what we did
When we did it overtime

If you've got the dough
Then I've got the heat
We can use my oven
'Til it's warm and sweet

I know I' bold
Coming on like this
But the good things in life
Are too good to be missed

-Enano B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a little on the x-rated side for The Beat, but you kept it respectful. We hope this vision of fulfillment comes true for you, Enano — but first you're going to have to get out (and stay out) of these places where the only bodies you see are anatomically just like you!

Anger And Guilt

I hold so much anger and guilt inside
Just thinking back on when that guy took my life
People say it's not my fault
But I feel like a broken rose that can never be put back apart
Talkin' 'bout it don't do nothin' but play back the scene
Now I'm throwin' my anger at everyone like they're the one that did this to me
I know I'm going too make it, I can feel it in my soul
I just want the happiness to hurry and come, but that ain't the way to go
I know I got to deal wit' the pain to see a better day
I can see the light shining, it's only a couple of steps away
Don't give up, everything happens for a reason
You know I'm not in the best situation,
But it's helpin' me grow to a whole new woman
Lettin' me know everything is goin' to be okay
Stay listen to my heart and not my mind
'Cause it play tricks on me at times
wish I can forget everything and start a new life

-C-Littles, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: One of the great things about being alive is that you CAN start a new life. People re-invent themselves all the time, and you can do the same. We're not saying it's as easy as asking, but then, the life you've been living hasn't been exactly easy, either, has it? So imagine yourself in the life you'd like to live, then sit down and put together a plan that lets you get there from here. We hope finishing high school is number one on that plan, because it can open doors for you that take you in entirely new and different directions.

The Biggest Disappointment

The biggest disappointment in life that I have is going out on that one night, because now I'm looking at time in the pinta. I should have listened to my mom when she said: something's not right – I don't think you should go out tonight, mijo. But no, my dumb ass wanted to go. Well, that's all bad on my part. Alrato.

-Young Mijo, Maricopa/Durango, Arizona

From The Beat: Your mom had an intuition. Usually the only way to get in trouble with an intuition is to not follow it. We're sorry you didn't listen. This is a very expensive lesson you're having to learn.

Missing Family So Much

I am living with a war by being in here because my family is stressed out and I am too. I wish I could get out so I can hold them and they won't be stressed.

This life in here is a mess. I'm not used to waking up in a white box. Then I have to listen to people tell me what to do all day or threaten me and tell me I'm going to get time in my room. The worst part is the food. I'm used to some real home cooked food, not this nasty fake food unless it's McDonald's or Burger King. I miss walking in the house and my sister or mother sayin' something crazy to make me laugh when I'm upset, or when they call my cell phone just to say, "I love you," or "I miss you, what you doing?"

I just miss the little shhh. This is so hard to be locked up. When I get out I'm 100% sure I'm not coming back. I miss my family so much you couldn't put it on a scale. I just can't wait till I get home.

-Orlando B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We can definitely feel the pain and frustration in this piece about missing your family. What you call "the little shhh" isn't really little at all. It's what gives our lives meaning. All we can say is that you are lucky to have a family that cares so much for you, and they are lucky to have you recognize that. You will get out of here, so the real test is whether you can hold on to that promise you're making never to come back. We know you can achieve that goal, but will you? Besides going home to your loving family and eating a home-cooked meal, what are your plans for staying free and moving forward with your life?

To All The Respected Angels

This is Uriel just doing time. Well, I'm writing to all the angels who can't be here with us today. I am just here thinking of all the good times we used to have. I know that they are in a better place called heaven, a good place where they can rest and not worry about even one thing. And to tell you the truth, I just can't wait to go to that good place called heaven. I just can't wait. RIP Rosey Yesica. I will meet you in the crossroads, sooner or later.

-Uriel, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: We hope you have to wait a long time before you join your friends who have passed on. You can do good things. You're a hard worker and we know you have good intentions. Time to get serious about your education.

What I'd Like To Forget

I'd like to forget about the past, because it seems that where all the trouble is at. If I could forget about something, I would forget about getting locked up and gangbanging in the streets and doing things that are not right and that can't benefit for my life and future.

-M Beezy B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: If you have the insight to see that the things you're doing on the street "can't benefit" your life, then why do you keep doing them? Is it because changing course is just too hard? Sometimes, the easy thing to do in the present only makes the future harder, which means we sometimes have to do the hard thing now so that things get easier then... You follow?

Time Is Passing

Time is passing. I do want to leave. But I mainly want to leave my mentality. I want to leave my past. I want to leave my memories that are bad. I want to leave my bad homies. Time is important, just like, I, Cito.

-Cito B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Wanting to change your mentality is the first step towards changing it. So, in a way, you can say that the process of change has already started to work inside you. Of course, you will be tested on the streets, so we hope your new mentality will win out over your old one.

Why?

Why think about the past?
'Cause everybody moving ahead, but you're last
Why do people gotta reminisce?
To think about things we forgot and miss
Why can we just forget?
We can forget 'bout what we regret
Why can't we just move on?
Because sometimes life seems so long
Why are we here?
Because we like to live life with no fear
When will we finally move on?
When we wake up and realize life ain't gone

-Yung Bird B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We often wonder these same questions, YB. What we find so tragic is that too many young people don't wake up to the reality of life's importance before they get themselves locked up (or worse), and then their understanding comes too late for them to do anything about it. What about you, Yung Bird? When do you plan to move on (and out of the life that leads you here)?

Taught Wrong

One thing that I would like to forget is when my mom was getting beat down by my father. The reason why I would like to forget this is because it's messed with my life for a long time, like it showed me that it is all right to beat on girls. I learned the hard way that it isn't right to beat on girls. I also see that right now my father is in jail right now for beating down his wife, and it just reminds me when my mother was beaten. So that is one thing I would like to forget.

-Jokes B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We bet that no one (including your father) ever told you it was all right to beat on women, but children learn by watching, so of course you picked up the lesson that your father was teaching by doing. How did you learn that it isn't right for anyone to beat on anyone else? Some kids think it's on them to intervene when their dad attacks their mother and feel angry and helpless when they can't. You've already learned a hard, sad lesson in life. Good for you!

Pain/Forget

i'd like to forget the pain i caused others
everyone including my mother
all those grave sites
all those deadly fights
all those sleepless nights
all those broken rights
everything that went down wrong
sittin' in jail for so long
throwin' my whole life away
in this cell i'm here to stay
forget all this pain
sittin' down in all this rain
just lettin' my anger feel me out
forget all those times i chose to shout
my mom being nice, me being disrespectful
those things that make me want to be forgetful
but forgetting means it didn't really happen
'cause memory is what i don't want to be lackin'
what happens, helps me grow
so really i won't forget nothing
'cause then i'll have nothing to show

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Some say, forgive and forget, and maybe that can apply to wrongs others have done in our eyes, but the wrongs we ourselves commit — you're so right! We can't afford to forget! We can't change past events, but if we're willing to face what they really meant about ourselves and our roles in the predicaments that afflicted us then (or afflict us now as a consequence), then we can change ourselves! And we're no longer enchained to the past, 'cause we've changed its meaning and freed ourselves at last from the same old mistakes that perpetuated endless cycles of heartbreak. Don't succumb to the hate, and you have the wisdom to change your fate, Big Vic — just be patient with it.

Looking Like An Idiot

I'd like to forget a lot of things from my past. All the embarrassing shhh I did in the past, I always think about and I feel stupid every time it comes to mind.

One thing I'd like to forget is when I was hooked on a drug. I like to call "5513."That drug messed up my life. Would be on the block lookin' cracked out all day. I got caught on the drug by my parents multiple times. I made myself look like an idiot in front of a lot of my folks. I was so hooked on the drug that I wouldn't quit after everyone told me to.

But now that I've quit for about nine months, I notice how dumb I looked on it. This is what I want to forget — being an addict.

-Franklin B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We really admire your honesty (we'll call you Frank and honest). We don't know what drug you're referring to (when we look this number up on the computer, it talks about a new heart disease drug for African-Americans, but we don't think that's what you're talking about...) It's good that you can look at yourself with a sober mind and see how you looked to others when you were doing that drug. We just want to remind you that it's easy to be clean and sober when you're locked up and unable to exercise your free will, so you have to be extremely careful when you're free to remember how quickly you got addicted to this drug and how it messed up your family relationships and your life. Don't be tempted to do it again, even "just once," thinking you can control your habit. You have seen that you cannot, so use that knowledge to change course. And good luck!

RIP Emmit

That was my lil' brother. We used to kick it every day, me and him and Chad and Marcus. We would always be with them, when he die.

I just left his house around 5:00 A.M. I got a call from his mom, she told me that second Emmit just got crashed into a car.

I jumped up so fast and I put on anything and went to Highland (Hospital) and saw my little brother in the bed. When I was talking to him he would try to get up but he couldn't. I left to go home and change, and I came back he was dead. That shhh hurt me so bad, I thought I was next but I am not.

Rest in Peace Emmit I will always miss you love always and never forget.

-Lil' Trail, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow -- we wish we'd known your brother. It's terrible to imagine that day. How old were you when it happened? What is the greatest memory you have of him? Are you and he similar in a lot of ways? What kind of effect do you think losing him had on you?

No Show

everybody tell me to let go
but i say no
tryin' not to let my feelin's show
but on the inside it just hurt mo'
knowing that my moms wasn't just smokin' dro
i try not to let it show
but it burns inside even mo'
my heart feels like piercing thorns wrapped around
and like my body is 'bout to fall to the ground
my whole life spins 'round
and i don't know when i'm gon' touch down
'cause i don't know how my moms, sisters, and fam' is doin'
i miss bein' on the outs and it burns inside
but i don't pout, i just smile
'cause i don't want my feelings to show
'cause they might get hurt

-Young Chase, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's true that at Camp it's unwise to wear your emotions on your sleeve, 'cause too many here want to hurt, tease and deceive. On the other hand, you can't hold all that stress and pain inside without showing a sign, but it's hard to pick and choose a time to cry. So just keep doing your best, and one way or another we're sure you'll pass this test. But check yourself before you wreck yourself if you feel the pain in your chest has you acting out in anger at all the rest. We thank you for giving voice to your pain in words, 'cause a lot of our readers feel the same way and appreciate what you say. Ya heard!

Living With War

Living with war when all I know is beef, killing, mo' money, mo' murder
Living with war when all I see is ninjas get killed
Living with war when all I know is smoking 'dro
Living with war when all I see
Young girls having babies
Living with war when all I know is war
That's it — mo' money, mo' murder
War on the streets
I live with that shhh for life
No changing
Now thug fo' good
I'm out

-Young Clap B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You've done a good job of describing that war on the streets that we read about in every issue of The Beat. And we haven't figured out a way to change it, either. But what you can change is yourself, and your relationship to this endless war. It appears that you're not yet ready (or willing) to do that, but when you are, you'll find that you have a lot more control over the direction your life takes than you think.

To My Love

Hey, this is Uriel, just here thinking about my girl and my little girl, too. I'm just thinking if I will ever see them, even one more time, because I don't know if I will get out.

Pero, just to tell my girl that I love her and that I will always love her, no matter what. When I get out I will spend the rest of my time with her and our little girl. Her name is Hennesy Jasmin. I am going to get her a little dog when I get out. I promise that I will love my baby dolls forever until the end of time.

-Uriel, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Everyday, you can work on your writing. And everyday, you can be reading and learning. By working hard on your education, you will grow as a person, and also, you will more easily be able to convince the court that you have changed. In time, education will be your ticket out. Start today.

What I'd like To Forget

What I like to forget is all the bad memories, stuff I did. I just want to live my life and be free because I don't like my mom crying or going out looking for me when I supposed to be in the house. I want to stop all the violence. I want to live for my mom and not for my friends. No more of this, I want my education.

-Young Sparkle B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It sounds like you're genuinely fed up with this way of living. We respect someone who can see their mistakes and work on correcting them. It's clear what you want to forget but, on a brighter note, what would you like to remember?

War On The Streets

What's up with it, Beat? This yo' patna, Kudah Black, writing out of the max unit! This war started for me when I was twelve.

That's when I stepped off of the porch and started playing in the big leagues. And in the big leagues on the streets, it's ninjas starving, looking for war. It's war for even being on them streets!

I think the war affected my life — 'cause of jail and a couple of deaths. The best way to live in peace, is to go to church!

-Kudah Black, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Going to church on Sunday, for sure can help, but you need to carry that church mentality around with you all week long. If you can keep God's love in your heart, which means that you show God's love in your life, you're in church already, whether you're walking down the street outside or here inside these walls.

Are We Hypocrites?

Crap, to all the people that's listening to the writing that I did. I myself sometimes wonder why do we write about some good thing like the stuff that we are thinking for us when we get out?

Don't get me wrong, just talking in a matter of thinking.

Have you ever read or saw something that was so positive? But when you or someone end up back to the street, what runs through our young, growing minds that addicts us to doing all the wrong things?

Then the person comes back to the crap hole and then when you see The Beat Within it's when you start to write something positive.

Now to all of us, what I wrote don't be a bloody hypocrite, knowing that you want something in your life, do it!

Crap! I know some people won't listen until they found out the hard way. And, when we all grow up we're probably going to forget all of this. Some people don't even make it. Yeah, like i said don't be ignorant!!!

All right then, I am out.

-Writing The Positive, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It takes a certain kind of heart and courage to ask all the tough questions, like you do in here. Why DO you think it's so hard for people to follow up on the positive and hopeful things they write in The Beat. Is it because they are hypocrites, like you say? Were you a hypocrite when you wrote your earlier positive stuff? Or is it a conflict inside their people's souls, a tug-of-war between different impulses? We know you can't answer for everyone, but start with you and your own experiences. (And another thing, be sure to sign your name next time, you deserve credit for your wise words).

Living In A War

Every day I wake up in the halls I am almost promised another day in this hell we call life. I say hell because it can't be nothing worse than the life I am livin' due to the circumstances I am livin' in. I say hell because my neighborhood is a battleground due to all the casualties that take place. Whether it's the homie, it's your brother, yo' cousin when them shots rang out somebody got it, and if they didn't they got blessed.

But it's so ugly that we can't even see we killing our own people. And if you ain't payin' taxes, besides yo' people and people you know, the world ain't even know you existed. The police ain't even put in effort to find yo' killer. So if you ask me, yes living in a war zone.

-Robert B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We read about the results of that war zone every day in the newspapers and every week in The Beat. Why do you think it's gotten to this level of violence, and not violence directed at those with the money and power but those, like you, without much of anything? Do you think life will always be hell? Do you have any plan for getting out of hell? Is there a key (or are their keys) to the door to hell? We like to think that education can be one of those keys. Do you agree? What would need to happen for the war zone that's going on around you to stop?

When Is It A Good Time To Think

It's a good time to think, when you are all by yourself and you can think out loud: Thinking in my cell about all the bad things that I did in the past, thinking of how I can make life better for myself.

But it's hard, because I am in the situation that I am in — someone has control over my life! Every day that goes by, I think of my family and how I can change my ways for the better.

-Fat Boy, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Even in your desperate situation, we feel the power of your love for your family motivating you to change for the better, and that, in itself, is inspiring to witness. That path will set you free, guaranteed, first within yourself, and then in the world without. However, you must keep your eye on the daily practice of changing how you think, speak and act, which is to say, don't focus on when the door to freedom will finally stand open wide, if you hope to succeed in walking through that door and staying free on the other side.

Out Of Sight

if i'm out of sight
then i'm out mind
i was never here
to the world i'm blind
do a little time
behind these walls
and ain't nobody answer
my collect calls
but when i get out
it's like i never left
they think i wasn't able to hear
like i was death
talk all that shhh behind my back
then they want a ride in my cadillac
but when i get out
shhh ain't gon' be the same
i'm'a play by my own rules
in my own game
i'm gonna just roll by myself solo
and at first i'm gonna lay low
then i'm gonna do what i do
with nobody wit' me
not even my crew
doin' shhh legit no more grinding
at the top of the tower is where you can find me

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Yeah, we feel your spirit and strength and believe you can go the length of the race to the top of the tower where you claim your rightful place. No more police riding your bumper 'cause your car's full of fools packing big thumpers; no more "keepin' it gangsta" by following rules that lead straight to disaster. We know you're not talking about breaking weak to the powers that be, but solid as a G leaving the grind behind for a better reality that can only be gained legitimately by gainful employment that ensures your future freedom and its enjoyment!

It's a Trip

You know, it's really a trip for me, because three years ago, before I got hit by a car, I was with my new girlfriend, the day before. After that day, I never seen her again. Yeah, I thought about her.

Life's been a trip for me lately. Sometimes I wonder if God is playing with me, or if he's rewarding me. All I know is there is a reason that she came back into my life! You never know what's in store in life. Well, until next time, it's your crazy Uncle Fairlas saying keep a smile on your face, because there's a reason you're living.

-Fairlas

From The Beat: Let's call it a second chance, or if you see it as a reward, let's call it an advance. God is fronting you a blessing in hopes that this time off the street, you'll learn your lesson. What we're saying is, it's time to put the "crazy Uncle Fairlas" in the history book. It's time for you to square up, just enough to show God you deserve this good stuff coming your way these days. The reason God's blessing you in this season, is to urge you to show your gratitude with a change of attitude when you hit the gate. Late.

War Everywhere I Go

What's up wit' it, Beat? This be Big Will Sasquatch from Hayward. I want to give my utmost respect to all who respect me. Well, now down to business: Right this minute, we are at way, trying supposedly to bring peace to Iraq — but we can't!

Well, on the streets, we've been at war for the longest of times. There are different types of wars going on in the streets. For example, there are gang wars, drug wars, and race wars. Everywhere I go, I am at war, 'cause when you gang bang, you have enemies. You also have enemies when you sell drugs.

Well, I really got nothing else to say but that war will be around forever.

-Sasquatch, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We can accept your conclusion and still work toward peace. Hobbes (in the Seventeenth Century) wrote that the natural state of man is a state of war. He did not mean that we are always at war, but that even truces and peaceful times are but pauses in the action. Others have argued that when we all benefit from peace, war becomes less desirable. Then the question becomes, what are the incentives to peace and what are the motives of war. Here's an example to help illustrate. Coyotes eat jack rabbits, but outside a kitchen attached to a casino in the middle of the desert, uneaten food got tossed out the backdoor — and there were rabbits and coyotes together, peacefully filling their bellies.

Living With War

living the oakland war
black people dying everyday
open the newspapers
reading about one of our black people dead
i heard that i had to go to a funeral
i feel they need to stop the killing in oakland
because you don't know
how people's moms be feeling
that they kids are in heaven or hell

-Alfonzo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The killings break mothers' hearts, but brothers and sisters, too. In fact, all the youngsters growing up in the "war zone" are growing up in fear, 'cause you never know when bullets might start flying. Or, worse than feeling the fear perhaps, are the youngsters who will go numb and go dumb with a gun in hand.

War Out the House

living with war every day of my life
every time i step out the house
i got my parents wondering if everything is all right
as soon as i step through the door
and i'm not out there dead in the street
it's like a big relief
you know how much love yo' parents have for you
if you out all night and they up waitin' for you
so think to yo'self
how would [will] you survive in this world
this nuckles

-Nuckles, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This a great little poem in free verse (free verse means you don't have to rhyme in every line), that teaches its readers to see the truth in what's right in front of their eyes. But now, you can't let any lies sneak into "how you would survive in this world" — quit playin' a game that's guaranteed to end in pain no matter how smart you are, mayne!

The War In My World

It's hard for me to survive out there man because I have to sell drugs to feed myself, stay fitted because my mom had six kids. She's not even my mom, she's my aunt. She got me since I was six months. So I call her my mom. She was always there for me like my mom. I grew up and I wanted a lot of things, man, but she couldn't give it to me.

I wanted to dress like everybody else, eat whatever I want, like street 'hood. I wanted a car so I hustled for a car, but when I got arrested, everything got taken away by the police. I don't have nothing! I had three cars and all three of them got took away. My gun got took away too. All I got is three hundred dollars to start up again.

When I get out of here, I'm gonna get a job. I'm gonna be 18. I just want everybody to know that quick money comes but it goes right in the garbage. My sister's boyfriend can get me a job as a construction worker. It's gonna be easier for me to live.

-Lil' Nacho B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You started your piece by saying, "I have to sell drugs to feed myself," but then you ended it by putting some real positive goals out there. Our question to you is what is different about you now than when you were on the outs? How have you changed? And how will you deal with temptation once you're free again?

A Day In The County

A day in the County ain't coo', but it's the life that I chose that got me sitting in max' unit for something I didn't do!

Everyday that goes by, I get mad, because I'm in here in the worst position in my life. I miss my family and my folks on the streets. When my mom comes to see me, she keeps my hopes up. She tells me that I'm gon' beat the case and that everybody still loves me, but yet I still feel left behind, like I don't belong here.

I could be doing something different besides being around these j-cats. All I do is count the days that go by and say, "Well, it's just another day in the County."

-Fat Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Up front, facing the truth doesn't make the consequences easier to bear. However, facing the truth is the only road to freedom — true freedom, which is to say, lasting freedom. Yes, it's the life you chose, though we wonder how big a part circumstances played in your choice. Also, as you see, circumstances change. Wisdom, may or may not grow, in the face of choices you made in the past and changing circumstances. Are you ready to use truth as a tool of wisdom, a road to freedom, by changing your what you choose to say and do in the light of truth?

Changing Life Style

in a position where i gotta change
'cause in the next level you start some shhh
the system beat out yo' brains
gotta prepare for the worst
'cause the truth hurts
when you find out your main
broad ain't solid as she say
some fake it like they don't care
but they feeling the sorrow
knowing damn well they'll feel it tomorrow
can't sleep so i'm up working out
stressing
feeling like i ain't neva gettin' out

-Sebastian, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Tough poem about a tough situation you're feeling 'cause you're facing the hard facts of the consequences of your previous choices and acts. We're not saying you got a fair shake out the crib, but the hardest fact is, from whatever hand we get dealt at birth, it's ours to play for better or worse. And whenever you're ready to accept that "better" begins within yourself regardless of your situation, the better choices you'll be making. You've got a first-rate mind, blinded by the glitter on the grind, but when your eyes adjust to the darkness of doing time — yeah, you gotta change, just to maintain. In the end, it will be your gain if you go inside and start with mending your heart. To see some love in your life, give it away left and right, at least on paper, where poems shadow forth the shape of a soul's savior.

My Life At Seventeen

It is okay, but it is hard because it is a lot of people getting killed. But i am grateful for not being in the streets right now. I would maybe be dead. But I am not dead — so this is my life at seventeen years old.

I have my life because my grandma is still in my life. So that is cool. That's what keeps me motivated, and my other family is, too — like my mom. She is still working so she won't get to see me at visiting. My dad don't come no more. I think he is back on drugs, so I am mad about that.

So this is my life at the age of seventeen. My life is cool. God still wants me to be here. So I will let you go now. See you later.

-Demetrus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a trip how you don't see your mom because she's doing a good thing, working; and you don't see your dad because he's out there messing up! One absence is so easy to forgive, while the other makes you mad. We know how much you love your grandma, and thank God she's still there for you. If you just keep doing the best you can, your life will get better. So stay strong through fair and stormy weather.

Sponge Bob #1

My favorite cartoon character is Sponge Bob. He go! The things he be doing be dumb, but it's all good 'cause he go dumb! And his pet, Garry, man, he just hella smart! I think Garry should be the one running the house. And his friend, Patrick, he just hella slow, too.

But I have more favorite characters, like Barney: he go dumb, too! I used to have lots of tapes of him. And another one is Kermit the Frog. I love the frog! That's my number one favorite cartoon! And he just funny. I used to be stuck on the TV when he came on — and the pig! She used to be on the frog. They used to be kissin' and stuff.

-Rp, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We know you've brought smiles to the faces of your readers just by stirring memories of your favorite cartoon characters, 'cause you weren't the only one stuck in front of the TV laughing! It's funny how it can make us happy (for a minute) just to remember what used to make us laugh. Thanks for sharing the memories.

What I'd like to forget.

One thing I'd like to forget is, when I went to a party with my partna and we got hella drunk and we went upstairs to talk with some girls and my partna sat next to the window that was open. After talking to the girls for a while, he was still by the window. He was telling me he was way too drunk and felt hella dizzy. I wasn't thinking too much of it, so I said, "Whatever" and went back down stairs.

About twenty minutes later I heard a girl screaming because my friend fell out the window and landed on the concrete.

Now, to this day, I feel really bad for not listening to him when he was telling me he was dizzy. RIP Ray Ray, never forgotten.

-Lil Smoke, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's terrible. What a tragic accident. So sad. It's not your fault though. But, it's definitely a reminder that drugs and alcohol can be very dangerous, even in everyday situations, like sitting near a window. Be careful. RIP Ray Ray.

Leave Me Alone

i used to wonder about
what am i going to do
when the police keep mess with me
leave me alone
all I can say
i used to wonder about
living and dying
because i just don't care
mo' love
or no love
i think the difference lies
between tears and crying
i used to wonder about
here and there
i think the distance is nowhere

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a catchy phrase: Mo' love or no love! But it's a set up for a fall, unless you're saying it to yourself alone. To yourself, it means that you must give more love or you'll get no love. Addressed to another, it's a straight-up threat, and will backfire on you yet. Still, what you write here is a terrific poem! (Are any of the lines sampled? If so, give credit in a note at the end.) As for police harassment, rise above. Tap into your own inner love till they're nothing but a bad dream on a restless night.

Living With War

War is life.
I live with it every day.
Every second, minute, and hour of the day is war.
So when you ask about living with war,
it's simple to see that I live it all the time.
Life is a hard war to fight.

-TI Baby, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Life is hard war to fight, you said it perfectly. Tell us this... what or who are you fighting against? Enemies? The System? Your family? The streets? Things inside of yourself? And who or what are your allies in this war? Who or what makes you powerful, stronger? You know how they say that a pencil is a weapon? Well, we believe in that metaphor too. Your pencil –or pen – your writing, your education, your voice, is a weapon that can help you win the war against poverty, ignorance, and the nightmare of living at the mercy of the system. These are our weapons. What are yours?

Some Of Us Cry

As I sit in this cell
Knowing damn well
This ain't hell
But being locked up
Trying not to be caught up.
It seems like, once it gets good
It's gonna get worse
But I feel like my life has so much hurt
These court people, they just don't understand
When you live that street life
You gotta have yo' wining hand
But when I stop to let my mind erase
All the stuff that I yet have to face
Stay being replaced
I wish that I could go back
In the hands of time
And show these people
Who I am
I been out here eatin'
In like a few different ways
That don't make me a hustla
But a lover
And a survivor
That's why I guess some of us cry.

-Baby Doll, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You've survived the streets thus far; don't you think that it's time for a change? Life on the streets is hard, what has it taught you? Being a luva(lover) has gotten you this far, now's the time to start hustlin'. Meaning: Get you butt off the Streets! Hustle to get back into school! Hustle to get a job! Hustle to get your life together! As a survivor, the lesson isn't how to cope with a bad situation, but to keep yourself out of one. Peace.

Everyday War

I want to say: What it do, Beat! Right now peoples is going to war where they live, and getting killed everyday. So people start thinking it's going to be: Kill or be killed. So it starts to get real.

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You describe a fatalistic attitude that does seem to typify the mind-set of youth today in the more-than-ever murderous streets of Oakland. As you point out, even in this savage reality, it's still a question of mentality.

Jobs Not War

living with war is hard
especially when you don't have no money
that's why people is getting hurt
because there's not a lot of jobs out there

-Profit, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You tell it like it is, Young Prophet! Ask yourself how you can be part of the solution and not the problem.

Something I Want To Forget

What I'd like to forget about, is waking up one Saturday morning when my day was headed for the best and finding out my big brother was killed by some haters!

I was ready to go to Milpitas skating rink. I was ready to have fun. When I found out the news, my life nearly crumbled — and I can't forget it till this day though it was nearly two years ago.

-Shade, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You will never forget that moment of that day, not for the rest of your life, though the pain will over the years become less fresh. However, while the pain is still fresh, use it to change your life. As you know, there will always be "haters" in the game, so blame the game — and change while you still have breath in your lungs and blood to your brain.

The Baby Lou Chapters

I.
See me, I am living with war every day, you feel me?
I got to look behind my back every day,
when I am on the outs ,
'cause it's ninjas out there trying to take me out.
It just ain't me, it's everybody that's in the game in Oakland.
You got to feel me my mans.

2.
I like to forget all the moves I made to get in here, and all the people
I messed over doing what I do.
I'll like to forget about all of my ninjas that died
and all the bad in my life.

3.
It's about that time, my man's, for you boy to get on with his life,
you know --stop playing
I have to do what I have to do to get out.

4.
You know it's me myself and I
so I don't give a ... about the next ninja,
so that's why I stay doing it, moving and keeping it lit
on them fake ninjas, and everybody else.
So that's why it's me, myself and I.

-Baby Lou, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We almost felt like we had to put these four bits altogether, because each one tells a different side of what it's like to be you, of what you struggle with every day. We see so many conflicts, we see the desire for loyalty to the people you've lost, the people you still care about. We see you feeling isolated and alone, like you have no one to count on but you. We see the hope about the future, a desire to "get on with your life" like you say. And we see you realizing that it's not just about your personal troubles, it's also everything that's happening around you in the city of Oakland. But with all this going on, it also seems like you're torn in different directions... are you wanting to move on and make that change? Are you wanting to get back into the old game? What do you see is the biggest thing that might get in the way of your life becoming better?

How I Do It

I go bad when I feel sad. Lock my door and I'm gon' go bad. Jail don't help me but it makes me worse. People might think I'm stupid but I'm not. So I go bad on the system that's how it is. I kick and bang because I stress, so I go bad all the time.

I go bad for RIP Cell and RIP Big Webb.

-Lil' Rony, 150 Crew

From The Beat: So much has happened since you wrote this... you went from being a "troublemaker" to a top citizen. But truth is, your potential for being a role model was showing even on the day you wrote this piece. You could have kicked, you could have written some BS, instead you put your feelings down and explained where the acting out comes from...you let the world know that you have more to you than what they see, and then you got up on your own account to read your thoughts out loud, and even when you almost got in trouble, you stayed calm and DIDN'T go bad. You know what all those things add up to? A boy discovering the man inside him -- a man who knows in his heart that GOING bad doesn't mean BEING bad. We know you said jail makes you worse, but something inside you seems to be learning how to be better all the same.

Forever Forgotten

Forever forgotten
My memory is clear
For, I'm out of jail
No more my fear
I don't have to see my mom sad
For her to shed a tear
Forever forgotten
The fear of me living in a cell has been beaten
What's in jail
To live for
Forever in my heart
It's tore,
Forever forgotten
I made a bad decision
I need my life back
To clear my vision
I'm writing my soul on a piece of paper
I wish the bad decision
Could just vapor
They say there is a song for you
Well let me write down things
I went through
Forever forgotten
Satan is always there
He makes life unfair
Who in this world really cares
For the life that I bear
Is God really there
To solve everybody's problems
I made a mistake
But, let it be
Forever forgotten.

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You may want to forget what you have done, but then what will you experiences be worth? The true value in all our experiences is the memory of them all, good and bad. You made a bad decision, that can't be taken away. At least you should be able to walk away from this with the knowledge to not make the same mistake twice. There's a saying about the Holocaust, "Never forget". Because when you forget, history may repeat itself.

An Imperfect World

Living with war for me is accepting.
It's hard for me to accept things for example:
Authorities, I'm wrong,
I just have to do it, and doing it right.
I'd like to forget putting my parents and family through problems.
I'd like to forget seeing a 20oz. can pop off a paintball gun and hit my friend's mom on her head.
Seeing a half of somebody's head get blown off, I'd like to forget.
It is still in my head like it happened yesterday.
And I'd like to forget being beat up by my dad.
I don't really get along with nobody.
I've just seen and been through a lot.

-David, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have been through a lot, and you deserve a time of freedom and love. We hope you can heal all those memories and take good care of yourself and the people you love. What do you think happens with the violence in our memories? How do we deal with it? How do you deal with it?

I've Seen Too Much

Things that I would like to forget are things that I have seen in my lifetime like shootings and shhh.

At a young age I witnessed my moms and pops get taken to the pen over drugs. I seen a old lady die in a car accident because she got thrown through the front windshield.

I also done seen a couple of people get shot right in front of me.

Sometimes I have dreams about the bad stuff I seen. It don't bother me but sometimes it gets annoying, because i'll be tryin' to sleep and I'll get a flashback of something, then I'll be up for hella long, just thinkin' .

All the stuff I don' seen in my 17 years of life ain't cool because most of it is bad, so this is why i wish that i could forget certain things. Then again I think that the stuff iI seen thought me some valuable lessons and made me the person I am today.

-Ray Ray, 150 Crew

From The Beat: In a perfect world, there would be mental health experts on hand 24-7 on the streets to help young people get through all the horrible things you have to see and deal with out there. But of course in a perfect world, there also wouldn't be so much violence, and you wouldn't have to have had those things happen in the first place. We won't lie – you would have been better off if your young life had been about the park and playing and love and safety and growing up secure than what you saw -- but on the other hand you do make a very wise point at the end of your piece. Maybe there's a reason for the life you've had, maybe you now have something valuable and precious to offer the world because you can teach US about the lessons you've been forced to learn. And maybe you can take what you've seen and use it to become a wiser, more compassionate, more powerful person. First tell us this, what have you learned? What did you see? Maybe if you started out just describing your life so far, it would be your first step towards knowing what that life can teach us all.

All To Get High

Back in January of 2006, the cops picked me up after running away from home for two months. This was before I got put on probation. The cop took me home and he said stay home for the rest of the night and start off fresh tomorrow. He left my house around 6:30 pm and I was just gonna stay home like I was told. The cop told me if I didn't stay home I would go to juvi.

After deciding to stay home, my phone rang at around 7:00 and it was my patna who wanted to smoke me out. I hadn't smoked that day and was trying to smoke a blunt so I said forget it so I left. I ended up going to juvenile and getting put in the system all because I wanted to smoke a blunt. Now I look back and wish I had never made that decision. It wasn't worth it and once you're put in the system it's so hard to get out. Now I'm sitting in here for my seventh time with my record in the system all to get high.

-Jake, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We have all been there before – we make a hasty decision, not thinking things all the way through, and get caught up. Everything was telling you to stay home, from the cop to your mind, but you just moved too quickly. Now you know – some things just aren't worth it and even though it's a tough lesson and you lost your freedom temporarily, believe it or not, it could be worse. As you get older the stakes only get higher so hold on tight to this lesson. There are so many things to get tangled up in, including drugs and the system, and once they have their grip on us we start feel like it will be impossible to get from under their thumb. But people break free every day and they are no different from you so stay strong.

Losing My Brother

I would like to forget is the time that my little brother got hit by a tow truck. We were at the bus stop and this guy and his friends were picking on my little brother and my older brother. I was thinking, "Hold on, this ain't going down like this," so I said "What's poppin'?" Then we started fighting and the guy pushed my brother in the street. The tow truck hit my brother headfirst and that was it.

-Leon, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We cannot say how sorry we are to hear about your loss. We know this probably wasn't easy to write about, or even think about, so thank you for sharing. Life is tricky and things can go from bad to worse in a heartbeat. We hope you are finding ways to deal with your pain in a productive way. Do not keep it bottled up – it will eat away at you from the inside out. Then there will be two brothers who paid the price for someone else's mistake.

Lets Have A War

i'm living with war everyday
it's war where i be at right now
it's war in the hall
some people don't like me
and so they want to war
it's war in iraq right now over nothing
bush want to war over something
that's not theirs
it's war out there for a pimp
nobody never could
get they' hustle on without a way
people a' come up the street
and let it rain on the spot where i be
while i'm hustling
trying to make ends meet
but it's good though
they want to take it to war
well it's gon' be war

-Young Rick, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Ah Rick, what can we say to raise your gaze up from the grind on the spot? Okay, we'll begin by asking if you're willing to work a legal, legitimate job. 'Cause if not, we don't see how you're different from Bush employing any means. We know selling drugs on the spot seems peaceful enough much of the time, but you see your hustle brings war-like muscle and mind 'cause it's the nature of the game aka the grind. Why won't you take that next mental step that will release you from the street wars' grip?

The War At Home

It's war everyday on the streets.
We really can't escape it because it's in our neighborhood.
We grow up with a war attitude living in Oakland.
I wish I had never seen my cousin Keke's dead body in her car like it was nothing.
After that car accident my whole life changed.

-Wallace, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It seems so crazy (and unfair) that there is a war going on in the streets, which is taking the lives of so many young people, and it's not just in Oakland, it's happening in neighborhoods all over the country. We are on the verge of losing a whole generation of young folks to the mentality that comes with living in a war zone. Please don't give up. Please don't forget that it doesn't have to be this way.

Played

I'm tired of the system playin' with me. I went to court, got a release and they still playin' sayin' I gotta wait but why? They playin'. It's crazy once you get in the system 'cause it seems like they can do what they want with you 'cause you are in the system. Once again they playin' so I figure I got played by the system.

-Kevin, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are dead on – once you get in the system it is tough to get out. And a lot of young people feel like once you are in they can almost do whatever they want, which just means you will have to try even harder to stay off their radar. Fair? No. But what's the alternative – give them the power to decide when you go home?

This Smile

Smile up smile down,
Smile up, smile down
I'm always upset with a down frown
Because I'm not the one getting released,
I'm not the one going home,
What did I do wrong
I just can't fall down, I got to be strong
Was the decision I made, was it wrong?
I ask that question, why,
at least I know I'm safe and my parents know I'm alive
I still strive
I'm doing the best I can
I'm my own person, my number one fan
Myself and my family make me smile
The juvenile hall paper that's an old file
I'm up, trying to stay up
Some people are so sad they don't want
To try to get back up, and try,
Smile up smile down
My face aint with no frown

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We hope you can keep your smile up and just know that the hard times can come to an end.

My Ideal Home

My perfect home would be living with my mother and brothers. Having family activities and outings would be great. My room would be baby blue with my name, the names of my family and friends would be on the wall. Also on the wall would be the names of my dogs (Chico, Pretty Boy, Chica, and Lady). I think that having family around would turn a house into a home, especially a family how loves and cares for one another.

-Aaronessa Maricopa/Durango, Arizona

From The Beat: Wow, it sounds like you really love and appreciate your family. It does not seem that you need a lot of items in your home, just a loving family. Sometimes it takes us being away from our family to appreciate what we had. It sounds like you have learned to appreciate your family. What can you do to make sure your family is not separated again? Good luck to you and your family in the future.

Time Is Running Out

It's time to make a change
time is running out
I'm speaking from the heart
Time is running out
It's time to make a start
Time is running out
It's time for court
It's time to get out

-Joshie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Amen to that. This little poem is almost like a song. It's so simple and clean and true that it almost deserves a melody or a tune, don't you think?

I'm Trying To Change

I might act rude and make my mom sad.
Smoke, drink and lean, then go bad.
I'm trying to change from being on the block with the thang
But ninjas always come through bustin' and let a ninja's meat hang.
Like I said though I'm trying to change.
I don't always like selling weed and cocaine
But I do what I have to d 'till I can change.
So I don't have to worry about being anything.
Like I said before, I'm trying to change.
People just don't know or don't understand -
That's why police roll up and put cuffs on our hands.
But like I told moms, I'm trying to change.

-J, 150 Crew

From The Beat: So we like the idea that you are ready to change but at this point there is no trying, there is only doing. People, especially young people, seem to forget just how important the words that come out of our mouth are in shaping where we are headed. If you say you are going to try, you are already saying it's okay if you fail because you were just trying. If you say I am going to change, it will be that much harder for you to let yourself off the hook. We realize that it's always easier said than done and there are no doubt plenty of roadblocks in your way but don't give up on you. Aren't you worth fighting for?

Misled To A Bad Life

I'm stressed, I'm going through hell,
'Cause I'm rotting in jail,
I don't wanna live my life in a white walled cell,
I wish I was 18 so I can get bail,
I was just mislead to a bad life,
This is also my last strike,
I thought I was all that our on them streets,
But me being in the hall, can be defeated
I feel I have been cheated
I've been mislead to a bad life,
Where do I start, were do I end,
I don't want my life to bend,
And be broke,
People take life as a joke
That is what I revoke
By your self
Stop doing drugs and have a good health,
I' m good, the outside is bad,
That is the life I once had,
I was just mislead to a bad life,
I'm locked up
Being in the hall I've had enough
You think that being in the hall is tough,
Try your life, it's rough
It ain't easy,
My smile is upside down,
I wish I could be the queen with that crown
I wish my childhood was up
I messed up
I was just misled to a bad life
I was in the wrong place at the wrong time
I didn't commit a crime
But look at the clock, I'm still doing time
I sit and look back now
What's there to look at
Only my future
Leave the bad in the back, good in the front
What's good
The life I'm living now

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wonderful piece! Wow, you express some really heavy emotions here, and use some vivid images to really paint a picture for the reader. We especially like the lines "the queen with that crown," and "try your life, it's rough. Nice work.

Let Me Forget

I wish I could forget...
My step dad robbing Taco Bell.
He slap the girl 'cause she wasn't listening and he didn't want to shoot her.

-Roy, 15 0Crew

From The Beat: That's a pretty tough thing to have to see your dad do. You sort of want a dad to set a good example, someone you can look up to. When he' robbing a Taco Bell and slapping women, it must be a difficult to know what the right way to act is. One thing for sure your step-dad needs help!

This Home

"My definition of a perfect home is just having somewhere comfortable to sleep with lots of food and a family. I do not care what the house looks like or what's in it. My perfect home consists of me and my boyfriend. My home also has my dog in it. My boyfriend has a snake and without the snake it would not be a home.

I am going to Black Canyon and I don't think that is called a home even though I will be living there. I think of it as a vacation where I can stay focused and get my life together."

-Charlotte Maricopa/Durango, Arizona

From The Beat: It sounds like you are not too concerned over materialistic issues. It sounds as though you want comfort and familiarity. It is good that you can look at going to Black Canyon as an opportunity to be in a structured environment to complete unfinished tasks. Although you sound like you care about your boyfriend quite a bit, moving in is a big step and you still have a lot of living to do so don't jump into something right away. Best wishes to you.

RIP Mikal

This is Derrick. Tonight I choose to write about my bra. I remember when he was just going dumb for the graduation from 8th grade in June. We was doing it live with Fanisha and Danisha, you know, twins.

I was with you the night you left. You remember we was gon' get them new gold ones we ordered.

I miss you man. I feel bad, yo' mom was going crazy, crying in that hot July day. When you left the whole school shed tears and came to the funeral. We went dumb the night of your "going home celebration." God took you at a young age. I'm gon' see you when I come up there. I love you. I need you to look out for me and guide me.

-Derrick, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is such a sad story. We think Mikal hears your prayers for him and is watching out for you and guiding you. He's sayin' from up above, I wish my friends would stop going dumb like I did, and start goin smart – so they can live a long life and not die before their time.

What's Going On In The Bay?

I don't know what's going on in the bay but everybody's starting to break to the streets to get some money just like all these youngstas.

I'm a youngsta too, I mean I quit school at the age of 10 but now I am 14. You know that song "Everyday I'm a Hustler?" since I just keep on running away from school to put bad comments/thoughts in my head and tell me I'm not gone to be no body, but I know I'm somebody.

I'm just not ready to change my lifestyle right now.

I have to go right now and do this time right now. I'm locked up they won't hit me out they wont let me out, bay life.

-Itty Bitty, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's too bad you don't feel ready to change just yet—it sounds like you've been living this life for a long time. We hope you really do believe that you are "somebody," and remember that there's no time like the present to make changes in life.

Forgetting Yesterday

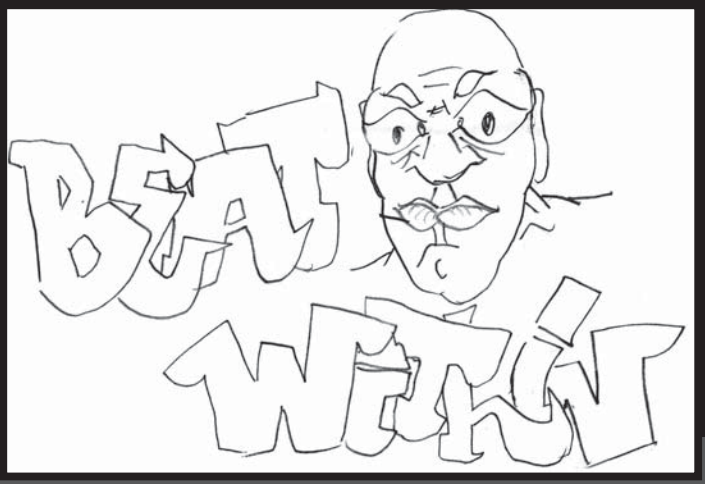
I'd like to forget all the pain and struggling...all the shhh we had to go through...the hurtful nights you put me through! That I forgive you for... I'd like to forget ever forgiving you...because you never meant to... It helps to remember, but it hurts so much.

I'd like to forget this experience. I hate it here. Being away from you for so long... Both of us stuck in an institution, feeling like quittin'? I felt like quittin', but I like forgetting that I ever wanted to quit, 'cause we don't quit. Our love keeps us strong and that's something that I'll never forget.

Forget the bad pasts we have...they're the pains of yesterday, babe. I'll always love you, my little wife.

-Biggie Littles LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It sounds like your experience in juvy, even though you hate it, has only made you stronger, Biggie Littles. You seem to have a generous heart for your lady and try to see things from her side, when you're willing to forgive her. Does she forgive you, too, when you mess up? If so, it may have a really strong relationship. If you two can survive being apart when you're each "inside," maybe you really can make it together on the outs! Good luck to you both!



I'd like to forget ever forgiving you. . . because you never meant to . . . It helps to remember, but it hurts so much.

My Mind's Playing Tricks On Me

Sometimes I hear things
Sometimes I see things
Sometimes I have dreams of people
Killing me in my sleep
Sometimes I have dreams of me killing people
Sometimes I hold guns
Sometimes I smoke weed
Sometimes I pop pills
Sometimes I'm with my girl
Sometimes I'm at home
But when it's all said and done
I'm at the Ranch
And, damn, my mind's playing tricks on me
Sometimes I'm with my grandmother
Father, brothers, and the rest of my family
Damn, damn, damn
I wish my mind
Would stop playing tricks on me

-Cash B LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Does it ever seem like in your dreams or awake in your imagination, your mind is trying to warn you that if you're not careful, if you don't change the way you're going now, that it's going to get worse? Maybe your mind is trying to protect you. Why don't you listen to your mind, pay attention to your dreams and nightmares, before it is too late!

Minding Manners

it's like a lunar eclipse
every time, each time
i think of touching your lips
panic at the thought
of me caressing
the inside of your thigh
as our lust we're confessing
tension thickens
as well as the air
and when i touch
you utter "that's not fair"
more knowledge about you
than any other man has shown
as i get past barriers
you try to hold off your mom
all this thought
by you saying "hi"
as we're sitting together
rubbing your thigh

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Erotic fantasies spurred by touch. It's an age-old story but seldom told with such clarity. The problem with that sort of seduction today is that no must mean no in a culture where rape is no longer tolerated as an effect of lust's heat — sexual intimacy must meet the test of both minds and bodies agreeing to what's best. Forget about overcoming barriers: no means no. Feed lust in mutual agreement and let some love show.

Sorry I Told

lost in sleepless nights
abandoned after noon
corrupted in the morning
and any other day isn't new
tongue held
because proper is an impediment
mistreated
for upholding the code of a gentleman
around the careless and narrow mind
along with people wearing masks
tarnished words are said so often
as their lives would break like glass
if ignorance is bliss
than i hope i'm on hell's bottom floor
if ignorance is contagious
i want to be its cure

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes love must walk the tightrope, like a circus act above the crowd below. Not a word is spoken, as there is no net, but the crowd clamors for all the excitement it can get. Of circus acts, one would wish to be the magician, whatever disaster befalls, all returns to its original position.

RIP

RIP to my homie
When I went to jail
I left you lonely
Now you dead
And I'm missing my homie
Why did I do the dumb shhh that I did
To get me put in jail?
Why did I leave you out there?
Sometimes I feel that I'm responsible
For you not being here no more
Because I would have told you
"Keep running"
When the bullets were coming
But just know that I got mad love for you
And when I touch town
I'm a visit you
You know it's a neighborhood thang
But fo' real
All I want you to do for me
Is watch over me in them streets
For life!

-Cash B LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Beautiful, tender, sad, real piece, Cash B. It's too bad that no one can answer what you're conscience is telling you. In Chedda's honor, can you change your own life? Nobody wins in the game you're describing. We all have to watch over each other, don't you think?

A Mean Old Woman

snapping at anything that moves
bitter
no matter what
even after she hears good news
    i asked her
    why do you act this way
    she curses me out
    anger
    sarcasm
    irritation
    all blows up as she shouts
no questions answered
about why you act this way
but my questions will be answered
some day

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's true that some people are so deeply wounded that there is a bitterness that poisons their relationships even with those they love. You may wonder why we use that word, love, since you don't. Perhaps we understand that's what hurts you the most in what you write above, all that hostility from what's supposed to be your natural source of love. It may not help to know (now when you're bleeding) that she's wounded.

Fools

they think they're predators
but they're in a tank with a shark
they act like a litter of pups
no bite and all bark
so there's no use in fighting
because it's already over
when you're still mad
as i brush you off my shoulder

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It takes so much more self-confidence and courage to brush off their anger instead of biting. That doesn't make you a shark, more like an elephant rising above any need to be fighting. They say the lion's the king of beasts, but he doesn't mess with an elephant in the least — so big and strong, he can just peacefully stroll along.

Enchanting Beauty Beyond Love

beauty encrested
beyond entitlement to anyone
an elegant pulse runs
up and down my veins when you're near
as well as a deadly touch
that will send any man to heaven
and you're not an angel
but a goddess that illuminates
all my darkest fears
you conquered my callused heart
that was as hard and cold as stone
and gave me a rapture
that i pray will never end
as i lay here in obscured ecstasy
bliss is the word for this gift
that you bestowed me with
i though i knew happiness
i don't know much of anything anymore
except all these confessions are true
crazy perhaps
maybe only for you

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Well, you prove yourself to be an accomplished lyricist when it comes to winning and losing love, or even recording desire's fiery course burning toward an altar to beauty itself — the goddess Aphrodite, the mighty queen of ecstatic rapture, born of the foam of the sea as in the painting by Botticelli, but truly a living presence coursing through the nerves of those who wish to serve her in the flesh, whatever particular shape she takes, whatever her status, whatever her dress. So, now, can write about something as mundane as how you can walk free and never come back to incarceration again? Broaden your subject matter, widen the scope of you pen.

A World

who makes the sound
to which everybody listens
who wants to wear the crown
over everybody in the kingdom
who want to dethrone you
    hated for better reasons
    that they don't understand
    as much as i have
    they accuse me of treason
    can someone still
    give the world knowledge
    even if they don't want it
    i'll do my best

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Gandhi learned from the Bhagavad Gita as well as his study of the life of Jesus, that the task is to do the work without demanding to receive its fruits. Yes, you can and must give, or as you put it, do your best, but you can never make another take the gift, and that's the hardest test of your resolve. If you offer understanding, love and knowledge, you've offered all. To change the world without, change the world within, speak truth and walk tall.

Talent

things finally flourish
out of a shell
of what you thought
was nothingness
    yet we ask why things
    why now
    why not back then
    why today
why not at all
things would be easy
if life wasn't like this
    maliciousness
    turns into things
    unspeakable
    yet refined
    beauty
    that's
    indescribable

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Refine all malice in the sweet silver chalice of love. Discerning indescribable beauty at the heart of things, transforms everything. Even malice is but the shadow of a heart that's broken. Make the deepest truth your meditation, and doors will open.

Tattoo

a beautiful promise
made of oneself
love and hate
evil and good
as time passes
wounds heal
exposed by a full moon
dragon's wisdom
panther's strength
in love forever
scarred for life
is what's going to be said
soon enough

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Let the scars on your heart be proof of healing, not the bitter reminder of the pain you were once feeling. Then "love forever" will be a calling all the more appealing. Forget marking skin, the real deal is tattooing your heart deep within.

Not A Thing

Yeah, it's me
Same girl who did dirt
Same girl who you called
If ever there was a time when you needed back-up
Yeah, I was there
But now...
It's not the same
Sticking true to my family
And at the same time to the game
Go ahead and holler my name
I'm up and ready
My lifestyle...
Well, it's steady
I'm giving it up y'all
Yup, this the final note
My family broke my heart
When they made that vote
My sisters said they love me
And they want me back home
Grandma, ma, and dad care
And don't want me to be alone
This is so hard to explain
I'll still be ya homie
But my family has always been there for me
Not you
So when you see me on the street
Have respect
And if you still doin' dirt
Don't talk to me
Because there's not a thing
That'll change my mind

-Jelly Bean

From The Beat: We have seen a maturity in you in everything you write, Jelly Bean, so we believe you when you say that you're going to start living a life that both respects your family and earns the respect of your family. You will need to draw on that sense of responsibility, because like you say, it won't be easy turning your back on the streets that you know so well. But then, the consequences of living in those streets is not easy, either. If you stay true to your promise, as we believe you will, we predict that those difficult choices will begin to get easier and easier, until you're finally living the respectful life you want to live without giving it a second thought. We have no doubt that you can do it, but only time will tell if you will do it... Don't disappoint yourself.

What Makes Your Smile Disappear?

What makes my smile disappear is when people are sad because I have much love in my life, and when negative bad things happen to me, I always find a way at the end of that bad day to smile. When I find it hard for other people to find happiness, that's what makes my smile disappear because it's so easy to be happy and I wish for others to find that happiness as easy as I do.

What brings others down is other people. Why? I wish I knew. Probably because the people who bring others down are lost themselves. What else makes me mad is the story judgment day. Why? Because I wish I could have helped that boy but it's too late for him. That is not the others that still await to follow the same dark path the devil plans for him. That's why there are people like me.

What kind of person you wonder that I am. That's easy: a messenger of God. I want to save people from being sad and going to the wrong path because God has already saved me. That's what makes me smile all the time, but in return God want me to save you. If you don't know what I'm talking about let me get more into detail about it.

I want to save people from this life into the next. I want to bring you to a place that no one could imagine or feel without some faith. I guess you could say I want to become a preacher. I know it may sound crazy, especially because of the position I'm in (juvenile hall). But I'm only in here because the same reason you are. I wasn't following the right path and when you choose the wrong path, which is the path to darkness, evil, sin, God will put you on the right path even if it means consequences.

For some reason, I feel more happy in here than I have for a while and that is God doin' it because no matter what position you are in, as long as you have God you could have eternal happiness and that's what I want to share with the world. I know it's gonna be very hard and difficult and people will try to bring me down but you know what? With God by my side, I'm up for the challenge!

-Mark

From The Beat: First, we have to point out one disagreement with you about the boy who wrote "Judgment Day." It's not too late for him, and it's really never too late for anyone. Even if he's going to spend every hour he has left on earth behind walls and bars, it's still not too late to free his mind, to produce great literature or art, to be the link to some other boy that provides a lifeline. The second thing is this. We are so happy for you that the God you have found keeps you upbeat and forward looking, and will make that critical difference in how you live your life from this point on. But at the same time, we believe there are many paths to salvation. If Christian love makes you a righteous person, we applaud you. But we applaud everyone who seeks a path of righteous, whether it comes from organized religion (including Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and all the rest), or whether it comes from a personal quest that involves the desire to think in a different way and act in a different way. We have known too many righteous atheists to believe that any one religion or philosophy has a monopoly on righteousness. You may not agree with us, and that's fine. We are just happy that you have found a way out and up.

Una Entrevista Entre Amigas

La Gorda: Estoy aqui acordandome de mi pasado.
La Dreamer: Simon, ¿te acuerdas cuando vivíamos juntas?
G: Orale, la neta sino fuera por ti quien sabe donde estubiera.
D: ¿Pues para que son las homitas? Yo te hago paros y tu no me debes nada. Todo viene de mi corazón. True homegirl love, que no?
G: Tú siempre estas en mi corazón por vida homegirl y nunca quedas atras.
D: Orale esta firme Gorda. Lees mi mente todas las veces. Tú eres primero y nunca queda atras.
G: Orale espero que las carnalas sepan que es lo que es el verdadero amor que yo tengo por ti. Mantengas sus cabezas.

From The Beat: De la misma manera como se hablan en estos momentos, esperamos que de esa misma manera se ayuden en mantenerse afuera de las carceles cuando esten efuera. ¿Creen que puedan hacer esto por ustedes mismas? Les deseamos lo mejor a ustedes.

Empty

I have this empty feeling inside
Every night I want to cry
Sometimes I don' know why I try
I try to stay strong so I can carry on
I want this emptiness to go away
So I can go through each day
Knowin' that I'm gonna be OK
I just keep my head up and stay strong
For those who need me the most – myself

-Brown Eyes

From The Beat: All we can tell you is this, Brown Eyes... What you're experiencing and feeling right now is just a momentary snapshot in your life. You need to look to the future and realize that things won't always be like they are today. What tomorrow brings is in your hands.

I Love You Dad!

What makes my smile disappear is when I see my dad cry after I have a visit with him. It makes my smile go away because I cry with him, knowing this can be the last time I see him. He is really sick with Hep. C and his liver is failing. The only thing keeping him alive are his shots.

I feel I've put him through enough and I'm ready to change. I feel that I'm ready to help my family when I get out of my cell and step up in life. Well, I always pray for my dad and ask God to keep angels around him. Then as I pray for my other family members I catch a tear running down my face. I've gotta think of the positive and get out of here and change my life.

-Mel

From The Beat: You already know that the greatest gift you could give your father is to become the young woman he wants his little girl to become. When we read that you know how much you've put him through and are committed to changing things about your life, then we also know you are capable of making these changes. So many are stuck (locked up) in their own childish thinking, afraid to move into the world of adult responsibility. We see that you are eager for that responsibility and, while this will not make your dad's Hep. C go away, it will fill him with pride and love for the sacrifices you know you now have to make — for your sake as well as for his.

Tears

Tears fall from my eyes
and I don't know the reason why.
I try to hide them with my smile
but I know it will only last for a while.
No matter how hard I try to stay alive
I seem to always die a little more inside.
I try so hard to keep them back
but something always brings them back.
When you ask how I'm doing I always say fine
but I know deep down inside that's a lie.
I want to let go and move on
but something strong makes me hold on.
Tears still fall from my eyes and everybody asks me why.
So I say tears fall from my eyes to show the broken heart I hold inside.

-Brown Eyes

From The Beat: There is no doubt that you are holding onto a lot of pain, and that is always sad for us to read. We can understand why you'd want to hold on to what is familiar and fear what is unfamiliar. But at the same time, when you can clearly see the pain that the familiar (the life you're leading) causes, then why not have a little courage to risk something different, something new? Yes, it does take courage to move in a different direction from the one you know so well, but when we read your sad words, we have no doubt that it's time for a little courage...

Ticket Out

My ticket out of here is to leave with a great peace of mind. My ticket out of here is to get away from all evil and deceit and to stay eminent, to stay mentally and physically healthy. My ticket out of here is to leave all the old homies behind and my past and just focus on my future.

-Adrian

From The Beat: Absolutely, Adrian. The change you're looking for begins with the determination and commitment to make it happen. But it only begins there. It's the follow up that is the challenge. For that, you need a real plan, something you think about for a while, so that you'll know what to do first, and second and so forth. Have you thought of your plan? What does it include?

Home Makes Me Happy

What makes me happy is when I'm at home kicking it with my little brother or when I'm with the homeboys kicking it in Redwood City, blazing it or drinking. And kicking it with some females.

My smile goes down when I'm locked up and don't get to see my homies or my family. That's what makes my smile go down. And I'm out.

-Dumbo

From The Beat: Unless you find some other interests that are more productive than blazing or drinking with your homeboys, then you'll have to accept certain consequences which we know you don't want to accept. The first is that you'll be giving power to strangers — again — to take you from that family you miss so much because you weren't willing to give anything up for them. But the second consequences is even harder to accept: Your little brother, who looks up to you and models his behavior after what he sees you doing, will be following in those footsteps that lead him to blaze and drink... and lose his freedom. Think about it.

How I Imagine My Future

Let me start by imagining myself getting out of here and doing good. Keep going on in school and get my jefa's respecto. Back so far I got a lot of support from her.

I want to change my life's ways and I'm promising what I said to God. I also imagine myself in a nice looking car and having money, buying a house for the family and live this life in good ways. Thank you mom and gracias a todos lo que apoyaron en estos momentos de mi vida (thanks for all your support at this time in my life). This goes to everyone here. Keep going on in life. Juvenile - it's nothing. It's just a minute of your life.

-Roxana

From The Beat: Juvenile is more than nothing, but it's not everything. You have committed yourself to a different future, and that is something we want to support and encourage in every way we can. If you're reading this, Roxana, keep striding forward and doing the right thing.

It's Not What I Lost

Growin' up, ma not around. I had to raise my own sisters. Seven years old in second grade, I picked up my sister from pre-school. Little things made me learn to grow up. It wasn't so much that I was forced to grow up, but the fact that someone had to be there.

Now I'm locked up 'cause of a warrant, and my mama handlin' her problems. Times like this show me to open my eyes and just tellin' myself to try and realize where I'm headin'. Classic story? No, not really. It's more of learning to be more responsible. I did lose a childhood I could've had but it's not what I lost but what I gained from all these hard experiences.

-Jelly Bean

From The Beat: Wow, Jelly Bean. Yes, you have learned a lot from what you had to give up and what you experienced as a child. We are sorry that you didn't get to experience childhood, which was your birthright, but moving forward as an adult is what is important now. It seems clear to us that you have both the mental capacity and the will to do just that. We applaud you!

Where Are You Goin? Where You Been?

I been walkin' in the damn hallway
With both of my hands behind my back
Bound with imaginary cuffs
Walkin' behind a bunch of musty dudes
In a single file line
Like a damn dummy
And I'm going to do the same thing
All the way back to my unit,
Like it'll be different tomorrow, but I know it won't
I think I'll be all right as long as I stay true to my faith
And know that this is very temporary
I'm takin' this as growth pains
And a little maturing lesson

-Dub Mug

From The Beat: Yes, this is a lesson that can help you grow and mature. Your description of walking with imaginary cuffs makes us shudder to think about, because we know how many get used to the idea, and we hate that. You may be facing the same tomorrow, but what about the day after tomorrow and beyond? The answer to that question remains to be written — not in words but in action.

How Can You Smile?

How can you smile and act like nothing happened?
How can you smile with all that pain inside?
How can you smile and act like everything's all right?
How can you block everything out and not cry?
How can you smile and say nothing's wrong?
How can you keep those tears from falling down your eyes?
How can you smile with all those feelings deep inside?
How can you smile when you have to tell the one you loves you gotta let them go?
How can you smile finding out you're pregnant by a vato you don't even love?
How can you smile finding out you had a miscarriage and lost your baby?
How can you smile finding out your vato playing you with your homegirl from your barrio?
How can you smile when your homie tells you he wants to die?
How can you smile finding out your homie got shot and died?
How can you smile finding out your "homie" got drunk and raped you all night long?
How can you smile when you know you're hurting your jefita real bad?
How can you smile seeing your jefe cry in front of your eyes 'cause he thinks you're gonna die?
How can you smile seeing your lil' carnalito of nine living the crazy life?
How can you smile and act like nothing happened?
How can you smile and act like everything's all right?
How can you smile and not cry?
'Cause I can't smile; I have to let the tears flow down and cry.

-Morenita

From The Beat: Our answer to each of these difficult questions is, "We don't know how." All we can say, Morenita, is that we hope there are other things that make you smile in your life. We bet you could write another poem with the repeated question: "How can you cry..." and list all those things that make you laugh. Like, "How can you cry when you know how much your jefita loves you?" "How can you cry when you have been blessed with wonderful memories?" And, most of all, "How can you cry when you begin to use your mind and think for yourself?" You will never be able to wipe all the tears out of your life (no one can), but you can take much more control over the direction you want to travel so that you can begin to wipe away your mother's tears, and in doing that, you can begin to see a lot of reasons to smile. Good luck.

Back In The Days

We used to kick it in the park, carnal. I wonder why you had to leave my side. Suicide...

Everything change that night I heard the phone ring in about two in da morning. My jefita gave me da bad news and my eyes just started pouring, pouring.

Descanca en paz la única soñadora. Lágrimas y sonrisas. (Rest in peace unique dreamer. The sad times and the joy.)

-Roxana

From The Beat: We took the longer poem in Spanish out, Roxana, because we have seen it so many times before, just as we took out the parts about seeking enemies in the streets. It seems to us, especially when suicide is the topic, that you don't need to seek enemies. You need to find a way to slay the enemies within yourself... We're sorry for your loss.

What Makes My Smile Disappear?

What makes my smile disappear?
Bein' here, not bein' able to eat, sleep, talk and do whatever I want when I want.
What makes my smile disappear?
Having people tell me that when I get out I'll be back. You don't know me like that an' I bet you I'll prove you wrong.
What makes my smile disappear?
Bein' away from that one person that loves me for who I am. Not bein' able to walk how I want.
But I ain't trippin' 'cause I know I got my family and that one person who will never leave my side.
So yeah, I frown when I walk through dese halls. But then I remember those faces dat make me happy...
So I smile.

-The One An' Only Karen

From The Beat: You turned the tables on us by ending with a smile. We like that. As far as people telling you that you'll be back (and your bet that you'll prove them wrong), it doesn't really matter that much what they or you say. What matters is what you do. So, we truly hope you prove wrong anyone who predicts you'll be back, but only time will tell you that.

Can't Wait

What's crackin', Beat? Well, this yo' boy Lil' Spooks coming at y'all from this so-called max' unit. Well, I'm chillin'.

Waitin' to get my ride to the "Y", because I'm getting tired of this daycare center. I want to shake this bootsy spot and go see what's really crackin'. But other than that, I'm just chillin'. Waitin' on my special visit so I can get my grub on! Feel me? This County food is all bad!

Well 'bout that time to shake this spot. So, this vato is out. Alrato.

-Lil' Spooks

From The Beat: There's no question that it gets old, spending time in max. And there's no question that even max' in juvie is just a "daycare center" compared to what lies ahead in the graduated levels of the "correctional" (read: penal) system. Still, you're looking forward to the wrong thing. You need to look forward to doing some serious

Rest In Peace

What's up, Beat! This Lil' Bee, are you listening? Man, my ninja Ron got killed by the police. I didn't get to go to the funeral, man! I'm go' see Ron again when I get to heaven and rest in peace.

To my ninja Rell, I remember all the good times we had together. I went to jail with him on my first offense. RIP Rell and Ron — love y'all!

-Lil' B

From The Beat: The story going around is that Ron got into a shoot-out with the police. If there was ever a no-win situation, that's it. Please, Lil' B, at least learn something from the death of your friends. Their spirits in heaven, where all is forgiven, don't want to see you live and die the way they did. In the bosom of God, their hearts and minds have been washed clean: listen for their now clear-eyed advice (way past the grind) in your dreams.

Bart Simpson

My favorite cartoon character is Bart, because he is always playing jokes on other people — and he gets away with it most of the time.

He's also my favorite character because I was like him. I always used to get kicked out of class for disrupting class! And he says funny stuff. I like when he says, "Eat my shorts!" I always laughed when Homer chokes him and he makes a funny face: his eyes pop out!

-Ismael

From The Beat: Bart always gets another chance and always seems to bounce right back. Maybe that's why we can laugh at cartoon pain so readily, 'cause there's no permanent damage. In real life, if you continue to play the ignorant savage, they'll lock you up and throw away the key. So laugh but also learn from your personal history — and stay free!

When You Really Look

I'm here in a holding cell. I don't know when I'm getting out. I been locked up for the past nine months, and it's really not okay to be away from the people that love me. When you really look out, you see you don't have no friends. Nobody got real friends in this world but the people that love you!

Being in jail really make you think that the game never going to get you far — it may seem like it, but it really don't. So you really got to think about the choices you make in life, because the easy money is never going to take you nowhere but jail, or getting killed!

When you stop and think about the game, it's really not for everybody. I mean, when you start, it's fun and it's cool, and you really like it. You like it so much that you can't stop. You keep on doing it. Next thing, you stealing. You making easy money — doing drugs. So it really not take you nowhere.

-WaveOne

From The Beat: You break it down for anyone with eyes to see, but so many seem to choose to go on living blindly — knowing deep down where it leads, which is nowhere anyone wants to go. So, the first step in breaking free from the temptation of easy money that keeps you chained to the game, is admitting to yourself what you already know, which is where you are sure to go when you travel down that road: Addiction, jails and death. And while so-called friends go on just the same, those who truly love you are the ones who feel the pain.

What I'd Like To Forget

i like to forget about the haters
because they always hating
on something you have
but some of yo' friends be hating too
but I like to forget about them
'cause they ain't my friends
while i'm up in here
but it's cool though
i have act' the same way
when they go down
i like to forget about my past tense
but i can't —
we have haters in this world
— i'm out.

-Young Rick

From The Beat: Don't let the haters keep you in a world of pain and self-defeat, stuck fast. Forget about your past to the extent that you enable yourself to create a future where your freedom can last. If that means forget about your friends, too, until they're ready to come new just like you, then do that do.

My First Home Visit

My first home visit is coming up on September twenty-third, and it's got me thinking about my friend, Lil' Curoso, who's still locked up in the Hall. I hope there's a letter from him waiting for me at home, but I'll be writing him from home anyways.

Well, my going home for a visit has me thinking about him still being in the Hall and how hard it is. I hope he gets out in time for my party! I want him to be there because he is family! I guess it's just that I got so much love and respect for him that when I'm going to be free to go home for a day, it keeps me thinking about how he's still locked up. Well, that's why I wrote this, respect.

-Juanito

From The Beat: You're halfway there in your thinking. What do we mean by that? Well, wishing he's out testifies to your affection, but the real deal is a change in life's direction — 'cause staying out is what you both need to be thinking about. And remember your HV is a chance to practice how it's going to be when you're again totally free. Go back to how it was before, and eventually you'll go back to living behind a locked door. Nah, not no more!

I'm Out!

What it is Beat! This will be my last piece! Yeah, yo' EPA patna will be walking the chains in yellows. And now, if I go to state prison, I will be on the main line. But I should be on my way to Santa Rita in a couple of days. But I'll be coo'. Keep it solid.

-Kudah Black

From The Beat: Find a way to free your mind from the grind, so when you finally go free this time — you'll stay free for the rest of your life. Stay chill, and the time will pass, Kudah Black, fast.

Living With War

we are living in war right now
if you living oakland
because we are at war
with people in our community
we are killing each other
and what we need to do is come together
and have respect for each other
we have lil' sisters and brothers
who look up to us
so we need to stop this savage stuff
because our lil' ones are go to look up to
us
that way
i said
we need to come together

-Lil' Sam

From The Beat: Words like yours are part of the cure, if only your reader's heart will let the wisdom in where it can start to work its medicine. Love against hate, gotta shift the weight to change our fate.

Cartoon Character

my favorite cartoon character
is johnny bravo
'cause he like to sweat the girls
like i do

-Young Rick

From The Beat: It does make us laugh to see ourselves in cartoons. Laughter is coo'! Self-reflection is, too.

Life

life in the deep
ain't no fun
we got big thing'
you get killed
i got real ninja'
on my team
but ninja' at camp
is fake
they don't got nothin'
i miss my real ninja'
that gone
r i p
see you when i get there

-Cash

From The Beat: Your little poem shows that he who lives by the gun, dies by the gun. And the longer you stay in this life style, the more of your friends will fall. That's not survival, it's suicidal!

Are You Livin' With War

are you livin' with war
every day i do
standin' in front of the store
with a crew
tryin' to get more
runnin' from police
with a gun
and drugs on me
in school
tryin' to maintain
but they skip
so i do
they smoke and sell
so how 'bout me too
think i can't live my own life
but that's a lie
in the streets every night
in the car i fly
so are you livin' with war
'cause i am every day and night

-Ally Bo

From The Beat: It sounds like what "they" do is what's making the choices for you. How you gonna call it living your life when you're choosing to put yourself in a war zone day and night? It may seem like the zone is the 'hood, but really it's between your ears you're not doing what you should. Every day and night you get caught slippin', 'cause your brain is letting what "they" do define how you're livin' — and it's a straight-up bad decision!

Bart Simpson

My favorite cartoon character is Bart Simpson, 'cause he is funny and dumb at the same time, and he always be messing with Homer. He's always getting into trouble at school, home, outside, stores, and everywhere he goes! And that is why his is my favorite cartoon character!

-Tub

From The Beat: Bart always gets another chance and always seems to bounce right back. Maybe that's why we can laugh at cartoon pain so readily, 'cause there's no permanent damage. In real life, if you continue to play the ignorant savage, they'll lock you up and throw away the key. So laugh, but also learn from your personal history — and stay free!

Sponge Bob

Sponge Bob,
He's on the top of the world
His yellow sponges twirl
Like lil' swirls
He looks like a sponge
He is square
But he does not care
Is he really to the rescue?
I love Sponge Bob
But do you?
He wear square pants
He wears big shoes
Does he drink booze?
Is he really a super hero?
He's mine and he mighty fine
I wish Sponge Bob was on my call line
I love you
Sponge Bob

-Tabatha

From The Beat: We hope the both of you are happy together and have many sponge children and sponge grandchildren. Hahaha!

Forget What I Did

I'd like to forget what I did to come in here, because if I keep rememberin' about it, I would be thinkin', "Why I did it?"

So I want to forget so I won't be stressin', because I keep thinkin' about what I did and how it affected my family and what I put them through. And I want to forget so I won't be so sorry, because they already know I didn't forget it. Anyway, that's what I want to forget.

-Roland

From The Beat: Yeah, sometimes we can beat ourselves up so much for our mistakes that we get so stressed out that we go do something stupid just trying to escape the stress. Stop beating yourself up! If you change how you think and what you do in the future, someday you may be able to look back and be glad you went through this hell — 'cause it changed you for the better and made you put first things first (like how what you do affects your family, too). Focus on the future by working in the present.

Home Visits

What's up, Beat? This Lil' Bee from Oakland, and I'm at Camp. Went on my home visits, and my last one I got a dirty for marijuana.

But I was mad 'cause I got restricted fo' two weeks! But I finally go back home this weekend. But I will tell you it was worth it, 'cause I got dumb-ass loaded! But I was mad after three days. But I'm not going to do it again, 'cause I'm go' get a thirty day restriction if I do.

-Lil' Bee

From The Beat: You know it wasn't worth it, but maybe it eases the sting to say it does. In any case, next time it definitely and undeniably will not be worth. So now we see if Lil' Bee is addicted to weed or if he can say no. Next week, let us know.

Why Bother?

First of all, you do have two choices:

To serve God, or NOT to serve God.

To choose or to serve God, automatically grants you eternal life.

To choose NOT to serve God, you will die and your life will cease to exist.

Finally, by choosing to serve God you have an opportunity to automatically be guided in the appropriate direction. Choosing NOT to serve God automatically decreases your opportunity to be guided by the right path, a one way ticket to a place you'll NEVER be able to leave from, no choices, no questions asked, NO negotiations Final.

-Lb

From The Beat: Can you give us some examples of what "serving God" means? Is it about praying? Is it about following certain rules, is it about how you relate to other people? What are the ways YOU now serve God?

My Home Visit

What's up, Beat? I go on my first home pass this weekend. I would've went home last Saturday, but I got sent to the Hall.

Camp is a really good program. It could teach you a lot of things. They could teach you a lot, like if you don't have a male role model in yo' life. It's a lot up here, and they can show you how to be a man.

Anyways, when I got home this weekend, I'm go' kick it wit' my momma and family. Then if I have enough time, I go' see what my friends doing. If they doing the same thing, I'm out — 'cause I don't got time for none of that no more. I'm trying to be something in life. I'm out.

-D

From The Beat: Every week now you have something positive to share with our readers, and this week is no exception. You admire the way you're making the Camp experience work for you instead of against you. Yeah, there are some good role models at Camp, and a lot of fools who want to drag you down with them. It sounds like you're staying focused, and we know your momma and family must be glad to have you kicking it at home instead of out looking for trouble with friends or on your own. Much love and respect.

My First Child

Wake up, this is Dreamer from Hayward. First I would like to save my utmost respect to everyone that's behind these doors. My life has changed since I been waiting to go to camp, because I don't know if I'm going to be out before my Jinia has my baby.

This is my first child and I don't want to miss your pregnancy. It seems like I only had two months of a freedom this year. My whole life is going to change when my child come I'm going to have to sacrifice a lot. I'm not trying to be locked up during it's life. I don't want to be like my father.

Gotta go. RIP Arturo R. 1989-2006

-Dreamer

From The Beat: A baby of your own. It's the greatest gift in the world, and the greatest responsiblity. And already you have great hopes and great fears. What do you mean that you don't want to be like your father? What was he like? What did he do (or not do). You have these next few weeks to write out your "dream" (you must have that name for a reason) of the future you want with your lady and your baby.

My Next Court date

Well my next court date is the first of next month. I went to court today and the judge told me to come back on Friday.

I hope he lets me go home. I came back here for something I didn't do. I was doing good for like five months and now I am back in this shhh hole.

I was on FPU. In my probation office they told me I was doing good on FPU and doing good in school. So now I hope the judge lets me go home on my next court date -- but he might put me on home sup' or on EM.

I don't care, so long I am at home with my mom. See y'all next time, one love to all.

-Lil' Trail

From The Beat: First off, congratulations on doing well on FPU and school. It's hard for a lot of people to get used to it, so it sounds like you really stepped up. We hope you get back on track soon, and it sounds like whatever program they put you on, you will work it successfully.

Faith

Have faith in God
God will be there
When you need something, ask God
God will answer you
Be patient, the answer will be revealed.

-Joshie Boy

From The Beat: You've probably heard the idea that it's about having hope in the unseen. Believing even when there's no rational reason for it. Has this ever happened to you, where you felt as if praying helped bring you what you wanted, or needed?

The Worst Day Of My Life

I would like to forget the day my brother got killed. That day was the worse day in my life. Seeing my mom cry was painful. I can't forget my brother cause he's always on my mind. At night when I close my eyes I see his face, and sometimes tears drop just thinking of the good times we had together. I know one day I'll be with him again and that day will come sooner or later.

-Eduardo

From The Beat: We like to think the day you two meet again will come later rather than sooner (and we know your brother would too). We are always so touched to hear about the people who you have loved and always so heartbroken to hear about the loved ones you have lost. The pain you are going through comes out in your words but we want you to use this as fuel to do better in your life and not an excuse to say forget it. Keep your head up.

Going Through Some Thangs

I been goin' through some thangs
Don't nobody understand me
I wanna ride candy paint
I been goin' through some thangs
Hopin' my stuff stay the same
But they always changin'
I been goin' through.

-Deante

From The Beat: Huh? Add us to the list of people who don't understand you. Better luck next week. Ha!

Why I Don't Need More Time

I don't need more time because I don't want to be in here, because of bra's up there looking down at me, like Lil' Scoot, Chavo, Willie, Eric.

RIP my bras. That's all I think of. I'm thinking that they're about to give me more chances so I can go home with my family where I belong, so I can stop every thing -- like being in the street, riding around with my bras in a van or budget smoking and drinking a horny goat or off hella pills....

But that's the end of that because I need to stop all of that.

-Lil' Luis

From The Beat: We can see the conflict inside you -- it's like it's tearing you up. What you really want is to go back to the fun life with your boys, but you know that if you go there, you'll end up locked up again or much, much worse... That must be a rough spot to be in. Are there other things you like doing on the outs that won't get you in trouble? Fun that doesn't bite you back?

Even Though They Take Away Their Freedom...

What makes my smiles go away is being in Juvy. Also when I go to court and the judge says "Come back, you're detained."

That really can take the smile off your face quickly. Even though they take your freedom you should always smile and feel good about yourself. God is always by your side and he's always there.

-Emmanuel

From The Beat: Every time you smile in the face of imprisonment, you take away a little bit of its power...it's a way of saying "You've got my body but you can't touch my soul."

Going to Camp

What it do Beat? This that homie Shaggy from Oakland, comin' at y'all from behind these ALACO walls. Man, today I went to court and I thought I was on my way home but actually I'm going to Camp Sweeny for six months and I don't know what to do - run or pimp it? I got these things I need to do and I'm not tryin' to wait ,but if I run I will be on my way to CYA. I had to sign a commitment sayin' if I run it's a wrap so basically I will just try to pimp it but if something happens I don't know.

It should be coo' - I got my lil' homie up there and my lil' cousin might be goin' up there too. I ain't been out for a minute now and I'm really losin' my mind. I could have went to a group home 'cause they let me pick. I figure if I would have went to a group home, I would have run my first day. Well I wanna say what's up to all who are doin' time in here. Stay up y'all. I'm goin' to sleep.

-Lil' Shaggy

From The Beat: Hmmm, we are torn. On the one hand we 100% understand that you have things that you need to take care of and we all have to do what we have to do. On the other hand, you can't go to C.Y.A. Tough decision. But wait - is it really that hard? You say you are already feel like you are going crazy cause it's been a while since you have been free s can you imagine what it would be like to be locked up in the Y? Is it worth it for a day, for a month or even a year to be on the run when you could spend twice as long locked up? Hell no! Look there is no decision – take your behind to camp, pimp your program and get released. Any other way is asking for trouble. Be patient – your time is coming.

I Wish I Could Forget....

One thing I would like to forget is my aunt's death. Some people shot her. Yeah I was crying and I am still crying about it every night. I can never forget about that. I wish I could but I can't.

Another thing I wish I could forget is being up in here. I wish that I could forget being in here but I can't,

-Rolontei

From The Beat: We are so sorry to hear about your aunt – you are obviously still very upset about her death. You are right, you will never forget that day but as time passes, it will get a little easier. And you shouldn't wish you could forget being locked up. Without some of the bad stuff, we wouldn't be able to learn and grow from our mistakes. It's frustrating and sometimes feels never ending but you'll get your freedom again and maybe next time you won't be so careless with it.

Living With War

What will it take to live in peace? Really I don't think there is a way to live in peace unless you get rich and isolate yourself from everyone else. When you do that you might get outlawed and have problems in the hood or close distance to the hood. I think there will never be peace unless everyone wises up but that will never happen. Maybe one day.

-Peaceful

From The Beat: It does feel like people are never going to "wise up" and we are all doomed on some days but we if we stop believing that is possible then we are doomed. War is not inevitable people just like to believe it is.

Back To Society

This is yo' boy, you know the one who don't listen, Lil' E. They gave me another chance to hit the streets, a second chance at Camp Sweeny. You know, I can go knock my time out – six months gone and then I'll be 18. So six months at camp and back to the block. Young and thuggin' with no more paperwork.

-Lil' E

From The Beat: You sound dead set on burying yourself or going to prison. If you think you are wiser now and can avoid these ends, think of all the other people who thought the same thing right before they got caught up. What makes you so special? We want more for you and think it's about time you started wanting more for yourself.

Better Days?

People die and people kill so all we can really do is pray for better days. But war to me is just one set trying to get respect and money. My misery was so deep for years I couldn't sleep. After puberty, we start wars. So many bodies droppin' and it won't stop. I want to help.

-White

From The Beat: You make some very powerful observations in this piece – cause war is almost always about power and money. There are days when we absolutely want to throw in the towel cause our pain cuts that deep. But we have to believe that things will get better at some point. We have to have faith, be it religious or otherwise.

Cartman And His Crew

My favorite cartoon character is Cartman and his crew because they're funny they ain't fake. It reminds me of myself when I was younger running around cussing, fussing, curious and always into something. By the way I like it when they say, "You killed Kenny, you bastard."

-Cartman fan

From The Beat: South Park is pretty hilarious. And you are right and thought of something that we hadn't – the characters are not fake and that's what draws people to them. Sometimes it's good to get our minds off our minds and just have a good laugh.

Taz

My favorite character is Taz from the Looney Toons because every time that he gets mad, he be going bad and destroying everything in his path. He's my favorite because I be snapping just like him. When I 'm mad and it's hard for me to stop. So really me and Taz have things in common.

-Dark

From The Beat: Thanks for this piece. We hope it was kind of fun to write about something like this. Just remember Taz is a cartoon, so unlike us, when he goes "bad" he doesn't have to come to the halls.

Living With Loss

Something I wish I could forget was when I seen the homie Monster get shot, I was a very young teen too. I also wish I could forget the day I saw my cousin Skarface get stabbed in the face 'cause I really didn't want to see that at all.

-Shagy

From The Beat: Wow – seeing someone get stabbed in the face is pretty intense and definitely not something any of us would want to see. We are truly sorry. It must be hard to live with these kinds of memories, especially of people so close to you. But you are still out there running the streets so you haven't learned what you need to from this stuff and we don't want you to learn the hard way.

Disappointed

What's up Beat? I'm back again after I told myself I never wanted to come back to this hell. It's like being in a dark hole, just wanting to get out. I'm back for the same thing. This time when I get out, it will be my last time.

-Ant

From The Beat: We all slip up, even when we thought we never would so don't be too hard on yourself. We can hear the determination in your voice and know that you can make this your last trip here.

My Life

My life is a war - I live a crazy life on the block. Between the things I go through and the things that I have seen at such a young age, like all the drugs and gangs, makes my hood it's crazy. I don't think it'll ever change.

-Shagy

From The Beat: Even if the hood doesn't change that does not mean you can't or shouldn't. Life is not fair and there is no getting around this fact no matter how angry it makes us. But how is running around with guns and bandanas going to make things better?

Wishin' Things Were Different

Something I'd like to forget is when I caught my first case and came to juvenile hall. I saw how easy it was to handle this. If that hadn't happened then maybe I would not have come back so many times.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Well, we don't think that avoiding jail would have necessarily taught you that messin' around wasn't the way to go either. Lots of things could be different and we would still be in the same place we're in, maybe worse. Don't worry about what could have happened; instead think about what's going to happen next. You don't sound happy, so what are you going to do?

Big Bra

We been through some shhh, running around doing our thang, mouth full of gold and diamond chains. We had all the lil' females on us, but when war came it was time to bust, I was yelling out, while he was bustin', we ain't really have too much feelings of ninjas,' cause the way we live you can't trust nobody. Just need to be ready.

Anyways I just want to say what's up to my big brother Angelo. He doing some real time right now for something he didn't do, and he was a young OG in my book.

Everybody had respect for us on our block because we always stuck to ourselves no matter what. When we would go over a girls' house sometimes and they'll be like "oh no lil' brother can't come in then. Then my big brother would be like "then we both out."

Just like that. I love my big brother through thick and thin. We gon' ride or die for each other no matter what. We gon' always be in war with the enemies all day, every day.

My big bra did a lot of stuff for me. He put money in my pockets when I got out of jail and whenever i didn't have it he made sure I had food in my belly before my ribs started showing.

Oh and we stayed in a muscle car on 22s with dumb clap in the trunk. We even bought a hummer. I had an Astro van with dubs and five twelves in the back. Stay up big bra.

-T

From The Beat: This is a very moving piece about how your brother tried to watch out for you the best way he knew how. We're sorry that the system caught him up. Now you and he need to figure out what will be the next step. The hummer and the muscle car may have been fun, but they didn't save him in the long run, did they? You and he need (and deserve) a LONG TERM plan to escape the clutch of the system, the streets. Who will you turn to to help you make that plan?

Bored

I am just bored in this weak ass hall trying to get out and go back to the hood with all the homies, but the judge ain't trying to let me get a release. He is trying to send me to a group home.

-Cisko

From The Beat: Why is the judge doing that? Is he just closed minded? Or are you in danger of getting in deeper trouble? Judges aren't always right, but they aren't always wrong. Tell us more about the hood vs. the group home.

I'ma Keep It All With Me

I really wouldn't live to forget nothin' because I'l be leavin' too much behind, like my dead potnas.

Where I come from, everything happen for a reason. I can't leave nothing in the past, no matter if it was good times or bad times. But I don't wanna forget nothin' --it's too much to forget.

That would be disrespectin' if I forgot my dead potnas and my hood, so I'ma keep it all wit' me, 'till death and the afterlife, feel me.

-Byron

From The Beat: Yes, to forget them would almost mean to turn your back on everything they meant to you when they were alive. They deserve to be remembered. And you – it's a different thing, because you're still alive, so you can also remember them in another way. Imagine this: Let's say you went to school, became, an architect. Built buildings. Imagine if you could get a building named after some of the people who died, not just a building, but a school, a rec. center, a park, a basketball court. Or imagine you became a writer and wrote a book about all you've seen. Or imagine if you had children and named them after some of these fallen men and women. The greatest way to respect the dead is to remember them and use those memories to inspire you to make the world a better place.

Gotta Keep Safe

What it do. Man, they got me in this bootsie ass unit. I'm 17 and they tryna do me. They got me wit' several felonies and one misdemeanor, they talkin' 'bout ROP or the Y, but I'm 'bout to try and go back to camp wit' no home pass. They got me wit' one, possessing a concealed pistol. Two, havin' a pistol without license, three, a loaded pistol, and four, possessing live ammunition.

And all I was doin' was being safe. Real ninjas know how it goes, when in the streets a ninja just tryna stay alive, feel me? I can't go nowhere without the thump thing.

RIP to Paco, Bo, Reese, Meezie, Dubbie, Will, Ron Ron. Get money don't hate.

-Byron

From The Beat: After reading this, we actually called up some gun experts to find out if having a personal side arm makes you safer. And you know what we discovered? They told us that a youth who carries a gun is 11 times more likely to get shot than a youth who doesn't. There's a lot of reasons for that: 1. If you need a gun, it means you're putting yourself in dangerous situations 2. Having that gun makes you more cocky, and more likely to make you say and do things that you shouldn't 3. You having a gun makes other people MORE likely to try and challenge you. So there you have it. The gun puts you in danger. What do you think of that?

Ma First Love

What it do Beat? Well yo' boy from the 150 Crew. Well I wanted to talk about my first love, man she's a beauty queen to me.

We been with each other for one year and a month. Well she's all I got that can make me happy. I met her through my cousin in Stockton. When the first day I seen her I asked my cousin who that girl, and he told me that's one of the girls around the block from him, and he used to go to school with her.

She said she was wit' another girl that my cousin like. We was at the park and all the time. Well me and my cousin walk up to them and said what's up and I told my cousin to introduce me to her. So then he did and me and her started to talk, Then we walked home and I asked her for her number and she gave it to me and I was happy.

And later that night called her and started to spit game to her , and we got to know each other. Then we got with each other the next week, and we started to see each other more often, then the next three months passed by and I was the first to tell her I loved her.

She was so happy she couldn't believe it.

And I told her she was my first love and she started to cry and told me she ain't never had nobody who loved her so fast like I did. So on our first year together I took her out on a dinner and I brought her from Stockton to see the view from the Oakland Hills. Well it's been a month that I haven't seen her cause I'm locked up. Well just' to tell everybody the truth: Everybody ninja got to have his main female ,you feel me. Well she the one that makes a ninja feel happy. And I can't wait to get out of this shhh again, and see her again.

But by the time this get up in The Beat I'm gonna be up out of here.

-Lil' Ronnie

From The Beat: Man that is romantic, taking her out and showing her the view. This sounds like a potentially good relationship. What does she think of you runnin' the streets? What kind of future does she want for yourself? It may be too late for us to ask you this, because by now you've been reunited with your girl, but we must ask know: What do you mean MAIN female? Don't you mean ONLY? This girl sounds special enough that you wouldn't need to disrespect her by adding in side projects, don't you think?

Set Me Free

Set me free, y'all got nothing on me.
You can't stop a G
I'm gonna be back on them streets.
They tried to charge me as an adult
Damn I almost choked.
Set me free.
They know they don't got me.
But they tryna put they hands on me
Lock me up in a cage
I'm start so much rage.
They need to let me out this cave
Set me free
Me and my homie
I go to court on the 31st of August
they gon' set a trial date
If them ninjas don't come to court
I'm back to playin' sports.
If you know what I mean, rescue me and set me free.
Feel me?

-Lil' Suave

From The Beat: Little by little, we're starting to see glimpses of the real you in your poems... we always knew that even though you smiled there was rage in there. How could it be any other way? You've been here so long, and you've been so enamored of that bloody street life, and you have this great talent for sports that is being wasted. There's some good rhymes in here, like how you subbed "cave" for "cage"... but you know, we hope they let you free, but it won't make a difference if you don't deal with all that messed up temptation waiting for you out there (see what we wrote on your other poem, to see what we mean.

When I Get On the Outs

When I get out I'm gonna do what I do
it ain't nothin' new but a new shoe
I'm gonna be back on them streets
But I got to watch out for the police
I ain't sayin' I'm gonna do something hot
But I ain't staying in the house
That's just not my thang
You know I gotta get it main
Not the hot way but the right way.
I'ma still be with' my peoples
And make a ninja cripple
But I ain't comin' back to jail
'Cause I'm gonna raise hell
I'ma still gon' to school and stuff
But I ain't gon' be riding no bus
Me and my ninjas do it real big
We don't mess wit' the pigs
But I know one thing, I gotta live
When I get on the outs I'm gonna creep like a mouse. And I'm out

-Lil' Y

From That Beat: Make a ninja cripple. You're kidding, right? THIS is how you plan to use your freedom? We hope not, because you also say you're gonna do it the right way. What is the right way, and good god man, what's wrong with riding a bus? if you're paying that fare with your own honest money, then there's honor in riding a bus. You need to believe in yourself more, be a leader, understand that following all those stupid street rules is beneath you, beneath your talent and nature.

Ain't Nothin' Changed, RIP Cell!

What's good Beat.
Shhh ain't easy out here
when something has been taken away from you
but the loss we have been going through
is something that we'll never get back.
Something that makes you want to die,
makes you want to lay down all day and cry.
So many mixed up feelings.
So many answers not enough questions.
Stay up be safe.
They ain't nothing but talk.
Rest in peace Cell.
We know you're watching over us.
We going shine for you bra.

-Lil' Naudie Bo

From The Beat: Shining won' bring Cell back. Hurting someone won't bring him back. Doing good won't bring him back. The only life you can save is your own – so for the sake of all of us who love you, stay safe.

The Boondocks!

The Boondocks is my favorite cartoon. I like the part when it was Christmas time and the boy was bad during that time so when he seen that Santa did not bring his present he shoot at Santa. Santa ran up the chimney and was scared and gave all the presents to him. The End.

I like all of the Boondocks, 'cause they are so bad -- and they are so funny to me, because they are so little and they talk a lot of stuff.

-Boondocks Fan

From The Beat: The Boondocks is not only a funny cartoon, it's one of the smartest cartoons out there, because under the humor, Aaron McGruder is dead serious about what it means to be black in this country. You could get a full college class out of reading his comics (we'll bring you some this week). Good choice young man, we sure wish you'd given us a name!

Why Do I Come Back Here?

What's up Beat Within, this is your boy Little Joker. I want to tell you guys why I came back. I don't really know. It's like a devil on my shoulder telling me to hurt a rival. I stay getting in trouble. I don't think I will be able to stop gangbanging. That's probably why I keep on coming back because I can't stop. I love the life I'm living even though I could get hurt. I don't care. I love the things I do.

Well that's it and for all out there keep your head up and stay on your toes and keep it live.

-Lil' Joker

From The Beat: Some say that violence is as addictive as any drug, that the adrenaline rush you get becomes an addiction. We're not saying this is you, but we are just curious why you wouldn't care about getting hurt, why you love it. Behind every gang banger is a young man's story – a unique story. What's yours?

What It Do Beat

What it do Beat, this' ya boy Lil' Gary still waitin' for my group home release. Whenever I get to go home I'm just goin to do the right thing and just lay low for a minute and get away from all the people that I used to be around, and just be coo'. Get at y'all later.

-Lil Gary

From The Beat: Good to hear. What will you do to fill up your new free time? Who will you hook up with to replace those old friends that would get you in trouble? If your new plan works, will you write to the Beat and share the secret with the 3000 people that read it each week?

Missing Everyone

I'm just in this weak ass hall thinking what's going to happen to me 'cause the judge is talking about the Y. I hope they send me to camp 'cause if they do I'm going to do my program so I can get out of this system. Why? Because I'm tired of being in this shhh 'cause I miss my lil' mamaz and the homies and my family so hopefully they'll send me to camp so I can get this shhh over with so I can do what I got to do and do my program so I can be with my lil mamaz you feel me. What up to all, stay up. Separate the real from the fake.

-Lil' Vee

From The Beat: We hope you stick to your promise to yourself and do camp right. Don't get tempted to run – it only traps you deeper in the system, though some fools think it's worth it for one night of freedom.

Watch Out When You Are Living At War

What's up Beat. One thing I have a problem with living with war is you have to watch out for a lot of people because when it's war, it's war. A whole lot of people are going to be shot dead, especially in the streets of Oakland. When it's war in Oakland, people will come to your spot and let off a hundred shots at your block where I'm from. Because when it's war, people are out to get you and kill you and your family, especially when you got funk or war with someone. There's a lot of killers and gangbangers that will be out to kill you an your family, if you want funk or war you can get it. My hood is full of killas and gangbangers.

-Young J-mo'

From The Beat: It ain't right that we're living in dangerous streets. You know it. Can you help us explain this? Find solutions? You can't save everyone – but you can save yourself and maybe a brother!

I love You Always

This is more than just a promise.
And it's more than just a prayer.
This is a pledge that I will be there
Forever. It's a dream that will keep coming
True. It's a reassurance
So you'll never have to wonder
If I'm going to be there for you
I will love you always.
You will see it in my eyes and know
it by my touch. You will hear it in
my voice, and you will feel it in
the spirit of all the seasons we're
going to share.
I will love you because we are
So good together. I treasure the days
We spend and all the memories we
Gather in.
I think that some things
In life were meant to
Last and- if out tomorrows
Continue to be
A reflection of their beautiful-
Past our love will surely be
One of those things. That
turn into forever.

-G-Money To Lala

From The Beat: Your love poems are sweet, but maybe next go 'round yo uca nsend these poems to the lady of your life and use The Beat to teach, we know you have the same passion in living a better life.

Messing Up

What's up Beat, this is young Skwiks. This week I'm going to write about how come I'm always messing up. Two days ago I was sitting in my room remembering how I was caught in a circle of frowns. My legs stand tall but my arms reach short that's how I missed the grasp of support. My mind is strong but my intentions are always wrong. I can't seem to blow a breath of ease so it's impossible to live my life with unending peace.

-Young Skwiks

From The Beat: No life has unending peace – challenge is a big part of life. Just know that your struggles are human. But back to your words, what a powerful metaphor: arms to short to grasp support! Keep flowing, your ideas and rhymes are working.

This War, My War

I live with war everyday in these rough and rugged streets of the bay. I from Richmond so I know what war is. I've been shot at by grown and young kids (teenagers). I at war right now with another part of Richmond. I have to bust ninjas heads if I want to save mine, but I hate being at war.

-Brendan

From The Beat: We believe you that the streets of Richmond are at war, like some other parts of the Bay. It's messed up that you think you have to hurt people to save yourself. How did it get like that? If you could stop it, would you? Any ideas on how to stop the violence? You're brave to admit you hate it – because many people pretend they don't care, only to seem tough.

A Life In The System

My life is not like the average boy because of the choices I chose when I was a young teen. They changed my life and that was the worst thing that I could have done because I am in the system now. But I think now the place that I am at ... I thought the system was bad and don't get me wrong it's not good for you but it can help you get your life together like its doing for me. Now they're sending me to camp.

-De Jon

From The Beat: We wish you luck in camp. Remember: deciding to do better while you're in the hall is a lot easier than actually doing it when you get out. Stay safe and keep sharing your words with The Beat.

Forget All Of It

I would like to forget everything bad that I witness or was a part of. I'm not going to details but there's a lot.

-None of Your Business

From The Beat: There is a saying that goes "The sweet just isn't as sweet without the bitter." We like to believe that for those of us who have been through it, especially those of us who feel like we have been to hell and back, we have a certain appreciation and perspective in life. When things come too easy you don't always learn how to love those things fully.

Me

You tell me to be a man,
but you don't understand
you ain't lived this life
you ain't paid this price
you ain't had these blues
try walking in my shoes
you're right I don't need
to fight to live my life
right but it's something
I happen to do

-Young Skwiks

From The Beat: True, a lot of people giving you advice haven't walked in your shoes. But please believe that there are some who have walked in similar shoes, some whose writing is in The Beat Without section. We hope you're open to reading their words of advice and caution – and their understanding.

Stuey Is My Favorite Cartoon

I like Stuey because he is rebellious, funny, and crazy. His personality is unpredictable. He is my favorite character.

-Kp

From The Beat: What is it you like about unpredictability and rebelliousness? The Beat wants to know more about what makes you tick!

I Found My Ticket Out

My ticket out of the system is to get off probation and get off the street. I been in and out the system since the age of nine. My first case was at school when I had a fight and I beat a person up so bad and come to jail.

I spent one night in here and they let me out. After that I just kept coming back and my ticket is to get a job and not come back here. If I do it won't be the Hall, it will be the big house and I am not trying to go that far.

-Lil' Trail

From The Beat: "I am not trying to go that far." We hope you say this to yourself every day. You've been through so much starting from the age of nine? It's like you missed out on the chance to have a childhood. Here's something we'd love to see you write up: 5 things you really want to in your lifetime. We're not talking the basic stuff, we're talking your wildest dreams... it could be anything crazy, like flying a plane, seeing a whale in the ocean, learning to play the trumpet. Anything. Dreaming your dreams is the first step towards making them come true.

True Love

True love is the bond that won't be broken.
No matter what the challenge,
it's the bridge to our future and the door from
our past, its togetherness.
When separation could always be an option
it's never giving up on each other and the love
we want to last.

-G-Money

From The Beat: Thoughtful. Remember our response to your other piece! Though sadly, many people would disagree with your poem here. People do give up and get tired if they feel the other person is not holding up to his/her end of the bargin.

Mistakes

I would like to forget about stealing a car that wasn't mine. If I could turn back the hands of time I would stay away from my old friends and hang by myself.

-White

From The Beat: Regret can be overwhelming but all you can do is learn from your mistakes. The real tragedy comes when we keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

Love, Love

love is something precious
for that you will be respected
never take it for granted
because once you lose it
you will be through it
always treat her nice
and always do what's right
because love is all we got
lose it and you will rot
once i lost mine
i felt i was gon' die
so love is the ultimate gift
and i also love the kiss
and this is what i will always miss
love, love

-Drew

From The Beat: The player who puts money over love and greed over freedom, will never know the blessing of that loving feeling. We all need money, but it's a question of keeping first things first. With no hope of love in your life to inspire you to do what's right, everything goes from bad to worse. Keep the hope of love in your heart and do right, 'cause love is always ready to start a new life.

Ticket Out

Me, I think my ticket out is for me to get out is for me to stop messing with some of the people and stop doing the thing's I do. Stop letting people talk me into stuff I know I can get in the hall for and just stop thinking about men and money and start thinking about myself instead of thinking about other people and my son and the one on the way.

-Diamond

From The Beat: Yes, you should definitely start thinking for yourself and listening to your own better judgment.

RIP Emmit

What's up bra. What's happening up there bra. You being safe up there? Tell Mezzy and Meach I said what it do and keep if real. Bra I miss y'all bras. Y'all boys is the bras I was kickin' it with. I love y'all. I'll keep y'all in loving memory.

-Lil' Jay

From The Beat: We're pretty sure Emmit is safe up there, but are you safe down here?

Living In A Dream

Living wit' war -- living in this world is war, because shhh we gon' through, our shhh, we done been through in these last few years. It seems like I'm living in a dream.

-Lil' June

From The Beat: We'd so love to hear more about this -- both things you say -- living in a war, living in a dream, make us think you have a powerful story to tell... what is that story?

Off To Camp

I'm going to camp, but at the same time, I don't want to go. I want to go home. But it's all bad, though, so I got to go and handle my business. So basically, I'm gonna just do it so I could be Charley.

-Lil' T

From The Beat: Keep your eye on the goal: freedom.

Just Can't Wait

What's up y'all, I'm in here going through it. I can't wait 'till I get out, they got me for some stupid stuff but it's good 'cause when I get out I'm gone.

-Daynisha

From The Beat: Where are you going when you get out? We hope you have a plan!

Be With My Family

Sometimes I feel like I want to be with my family and friends, and in my mind and my soul that God is with me 100% of my life, and I know that I will be at home soon. As I leave out of here I will take God with me everywhere I go. I love God so much And I will give anything to leave here.

-Adrena

From The Beat: We too hope that you can soon be at home with your family and friends, and that the spirituality you take with you can help you to stay on the sunnier side of life.

Spidey

My favorite cartoon is Spiderman, because he got bit by a spider and ....

-Juggalo John Doe

From The Beat: Oh, come on. We know you don't like to write long pieces, but — "and ..."?

What War?

It doesn't even feel like we are livin' with war. I guess because we are not in the war.

-Juggalo John Doe

From The Beat: You've uncovered the domestic political strategy of this foreign war: and, therefore, no draft.

I Like to Forget

I like to forget, sometimes, that I'm in this world.

-Juggalo John Doe

From The Beat: As long as it's not an excuse to behave irresponsibly, it's an important skill.

Batman

My favorite character is Batman because he is the most realistic character. He doesn't have all those fake super walks and superhuman strength.

-Bubba D

From The Beat: Yup, Batman is a self-made super-hero. It's his will, his technical savvy, and his practice that makes him so powerful. On the other hand, he does have money, which helped him buy all those gadgets. But also -- Batman is a dark character. He sometimes has evil impulses, and he has to fight them to stay on the path, just like you or me. It makes him more human, don't you think?

No One Dies in Cartoons

Are Bugs Bunny and the Hulk, which is because Bugs never gets killed, and Hulk is strong, just like me, and Sonic, because he is so fast , just like me.

My love for all three of these cartoon characters is so special that I would love to just spend one day with all three of them -- because this world is so cruel.

The cartoon world is fun because nobody dies.

-Lil Miami The King

From The King: You are so wise... cartoons are sometimes a better world, where we are all strong and smart and clever and fun, where the music is bright and cheerful, and where the monsters never win. The real world is much darker. But this is the beautiful thing about Art, it lets us escape, and imagine, and dream, it helps us think of a better place. For example, we bet you could design a pretty cool cartoon character of your own! One who is strong and fast and never gets killed, one who combines all your favorite characteristics. Hey, maybe you could even call him "Lil Miami"!

My Thoughts

Man, I miss my ninja. It is hella messed up that I got to be up in here to Sept. 21, on a Thursday. Man they say I got to do three to five years up in the CYA. That is not a way to go, my ninja told me that is not the way. My ninja and baby girl have to come up to this juvenile hall and I don't want my lil' girl to come to this place, it's not good for this girl to come up in the world, but I miss my ninja and baby girl. I wish I can come see my ninja on the outs and not up in here.

-Baby Gurl

From The Beat: We too wish you could be out there being a mother to your baby. Knowing what you know now, what kind of advice would you give to your daughter? What kind of life do you want for her?

To Everyone Locked Up

What's up Beat, I just want to say something to all the people that is locked up.

It's time to make a change, because time is running out. Make the right choices to be successful in life, you don't wanna be a bum on the streets later in life. So make that change and God be with you.

-Joshie

From The Beat: Good solid advice -- so now we ask you, how are YOU planning to make that change? Maybe if you lay out your step by step strategy, it will help give a blueprint for other people to follow.

Do Over

If I had a do over I will go back in time to where my bra bra died in Oakland. That got me when I found out that both my bras died over some stupid shhh just because they was getting money. RIP Mezzy and Bow Meitch. That's what I will like to do over.

-Baby Gurl

From The Beat: That's something most of us would want to do over—we're so sorry that it happened and especially that it seems to be happening more and more. Why do you think young people choose to engage in a lifestyle that is so violent and many times deadly? Does it make you feel differently about the life you will choose to lead?

Trying To Go To Camp

I trying to go to camp because I don't want to go to ROP. I think that I will like camp better because you get to do more things at camp and you get home visits. I think ROP just ain't for me. I think the judge should just send me to camp.

-Tb

From The Beat: The problem with camp is that some people get tempted to run – do you think you'll be tempted to run when you're on those home visits? We hope you make the right decision, and finish your program.

Earth

I never thought about the universe, it makes me feel small.
I never thought about the problems of this planet and all global warnings imperialistic rights good and bad and animal rights.
Why take all the bad things when life is so good?
Why help, we could always let the world worry about the poisons
in the sea outside of California
its foreign policy
I don't like strangers and no reactions
your demeanor is my distraction that's no way to go franko un-American
no way to go franko un-American
no way to go franko un-American
where can we go frank un-American

-Sugar J

From The Beat: Sometimes it seems like there's just too much wrong with the world to try to help, like you say, but if we all give up there's nowhere to go but down. Gandhi said that "we should all strive to be the change we want to see in the world." How does that apply to you? Now what is a "franko un-American"?

What Makes Your Smile Disappear

When my smile disappear is when someone do something that I don't like or someone gets me mad or I think about something that happened in the past or think about what I did to get in here.

Also I think about my son in CPS and when am I going to get him back in my arms and when am I going to get out of here.

-Diamond

From The Beat: It's always hard to see and hear things we don't like—other than your smile disappearing, how do you handle that?

Wishing I Could Bring My Brother Back

I wish I can forget the time my mom called me and was crying because my big brother was shot and killed at a party with his friends. But one of his friends was only shot, lucky for him. If it wasn't for the ambulance taking so long, my big brother would have survived the gunshot wounds. He had one gunshot wound to the hand and a few to the head.

-M Mar B4

From The Beat: This is the terrible effect of so many guns in so many places. It used to be that when fights broke out at a party, that's all that happened — people fought with their fists. Now, youngsters are so quick to pull out their guns that kill other youngsters and wreck many, many lives. We're sorry about your brother. How do you know that the slow ambulance was responsible for his death?

The War In Iraq About Money

The war in Iraq started a long time ago, when Osama bin Laden was in the army in Afghanistan. George Bush's father and Osama bin Laden's father were really close friends back in the days, and they probably had something to do with it back then and probably do now. I think this war is about oil because of the money. We don't need the money — they got machines that are metal plates that make money, so we don't need the oil because we got enough money.

Americans are going out there startin' this war, killing innocent people that don't got nothin' to do with this war.

-Gonzoe B4

From The Beat: The War in Iraq is costing us many millions of dollars every single week, not to mention the thousands of lives, both American and Iraqi. So we wish it would end, too. One thing about money, though. Even though we do have machines that make (mint) money, that's just paper without something of value backing it up. In other words, a $100 bill and a $1 bill both are worth the same amount (the cost of the paper and production), but because we back our money up with gold, we all agree that the one with the 100 on it is worth 100 times more than the one with the 1 on it. So if we just started to print more and more money, soon it would be worth less and less.

I Walk Away

My war is being here. I just got into a fight. I get mad at times, but I let it go when I talk to someone. When I hit a man and he fell down to the ground, I felt bad for him, but friends did. They just talk about it, why I walk away.

-Jeff B4

From The Beat: We're not sure we understand all this, Jeff. What makes you unable to control yourself and keep from fighting, even when you know the consequences won't be good for you? Is a fight worth getting locked up over?

Living With War

Living in the gang war man, I've been living in the gang war for a minute Beat. Yeah, I'm down for my folks. My folks down for me. I love my folks and my folks love me. I chose my path a while back, and I don't think I'm gone change it.

Yeah, it's dangerous out there in them streets. People dropping from left to right but who's gone protect the turf besides the people living in them. The police ain't gone protect them. They sittin' back watchin' us take each other out so they ain't gotta worry about us. That's why I'm living in this gang war Beat 'cause I gotta protect the turf.

-Jr B2

From The Beat: We had to take a few wv ords out of your piece because we realized you could have said what you said without putting your turf out there. We really appreciate your honesty, though, and we have a couple of questions for you. How long will you protect something that really isn't yours? And just what are you protecting it from?

Cartoons

I like to blow a blunt or two then watch lots of 'toons
Futurama is cool and Boondocks is too
Shhh, you know what it do, you know 'bout Scooby Doo
You know 'bout Yogi Bear and all them old school 'toons
Some foo's is like 'toons but they think they pimpin'
But they really just suckas like Milhouse from The Simpsons
I'm gas, breakin' and dippin' girls tryna catch me eye
They like Mijik man, he fly
He Stewie, like Family Guy
Dese foo's can't stand me, why? Why they hate on my mob
They just mad 'cause we fly, they squares like SpongeBob
I'm da star like Patrick I'ma get a record deal
And be big like Texas, be the King Of The Hill
My flows cold like Mista Freeze, like Joker my shhh Stewie
And kick butt like Hong Kong Fooey if you foo's try to do me
Dirty, like that kid from Charlie Brown
You whack, you hella Krusty like that one clown
Now let me break this down so you not in the dark
Wait let me put it like this — Mr. Garrison from South Park

-M Mijik B2

From The Beat: Excellent word play, for though you weren't doing much but boasting about how tight a poet you are, we feel like you have good reason to. You have a real gift with words and we would love to see that grow into something greater. Do you think you can write something like that about something positive (without hating on anyone)? Do you think you could write a rap about how you feel towards your family — the ones who are there for you? Or any part of your life (or life in general) that doesn't compare anyone to Mr. Garrison (who is one of our favorite 'toon characters...)

No Chance To Say Goodbye

I wish my patna, Ray Diddy, never got killed, 'cause he looked out for me a few times and I never got a chance to say goodbye.

-J-Biggs B4

From The Beat: Could he have done anything different in his life to avoid paying with everything he had in the world so that you would not have to say goodbye? Is there anything you're going to do different so that nobody has to say goodbye to you?

Living With A War

The war I am fighting is to realize I gotta grow up. I'm seventeen and a half, playin' da same old rebellious game. Selling dope, weed, ain't keeping me free. But jobs ain't fo' me, etha. I'ma free mind that works for no man. But my creativity and my spontaneity leaves me to believe I will one day be a self-made millionaire.

-Ethay The Rosha B4

From The Beat: Well, it sounds like you've got a very important decision to make. On one hand you don't want to do things that may land you back in jail, but then on the other hand, you don't want to work. Have you ever thought about going to school and getting into business? No self-made millionaire made it without a plan of action, and education can be the basis for that plan.

Legally Grown, But . . .

I can't wait till this shhh is over because this jail shhh is not for me. I hate seein' males all the time and doing what other people tell me to do. I just made 18 years old, and I am legally grown, but I still got to listen when other people tell me what to do like a little kid. That shhh make me hella mad every day.

I love being with my girl. I love money, having cars, going shoppin', eatin' whatever I want to eat, wearin' my own clothes, doing what I want to do.

God says we are not supposed to hate, but I hate jail. So when I get this shhh over with, I'm going to stay free by not doing the shhh I did that got me in here in the first place. (Don't ask me what I'm gone do different; just trust and believe I'm gone do it.)

-Big Bills B5

From The Beat: Okay, we won't ask you what you're going to do different, but can we ask you if you've ever made this promise before? If this isn't the first time you've been locked up, then you already knew what jail was like before you came this time, but still you came. (And if this is your first time, then maybe it's enough of a wakeup call to be your last.) So the question isn't what you're going to do different, but what made you finally decide to make this change?

Block Talk

Everybody has their own lifestyle
In my neighborhood it's one of a kind
Some people go dumb
But we go crazy
People be disrespectful and rude
But I say, "Yeah, whatever, dude"
People brag 'bout how much money they make
And I say, "Tell it to the judge"
Same thing every day
But at the end of the day
What can I say?
Nothin' but, "All right, den, late"

-Yung Bird B4

From The Beat: Is this life of disrespect and rudeness, of people going dumb and boasting about their paper, the kind of life you want for yourself, or is it just the life you're forced to deal with? Do you see yourself living this lifestyle forever? If not, where do you see yourself in five years and how do you see yourself getting there?

I'm Living War

I live in war every day. War is in the streets and war is in your self. The war in myself is where I just do stupid things and can't stop it, because I love doing it. In myself people see the outside and not the inside. They need to talk to me and find out how I am inside.

-Young Pop-Up B4

From The Beat: Is the war inside you between doing what you know is stupid but loving to do it? Could this be related to maturity? As you get older and more experienced, do you think this internal war will become less important? What is going to have to happen to you for you to stop? The Beat wants to know who you are on the inside that nobody sees.

What I'd Like To Forget

What I'd like to forget is ever getting in trouble and coming to YGC and getting a case. I need to forget that, 'cause it gets me mad thinking 'bout it and getting my freedom taken away and eating the same food over and over — that's what I need to forget, no matter what and how, and forget 'bout all my bad ways and people I hang out with! So when I get out next week, I'm going to forget 'bout the bad things I did in 2006 and start over in the school year, 2006, and be the boy I was born to be since age one.

-D Stuzz B4

From The Beat: We understand why you would want to forget such an experience, but wouldn't it be wise to never forget being in jail as a way to keep you from coming back? Well, whatever floats your boat, we're just offering other suggestions. The one thing we want to encourage, though, is your decision to start over in this school year. Education is one of the most important keys to a better future with more options.

On The Map

Dark brown eyes, long dark brown hair
If you don't like him, he really doesn't care
Choloed out, dickies creased
Black or white tee
Bandana over his head
Look into his eyes, you see demon ways
Pain and years on the streets
Born and raised in the City
Where suckas don't sleep
And cholos and crazies creep
Frontline is where it pops
Backstreets is where it cracks
Out there doing they thang
Yes, we're on the map

-Lil' Shadow B4

From The Beat: We had to take out all references to your turf, Lil' Shadow. The Beat is not the place to make your part of town sound better (or worse) than any other part of town. Those "demon ways" you think you have in your eyes haven't gotten you too far, have they? This place seems full of young men bragging about their demon eyes (and demon ways), but the one thing we see that they all have in common: they are unwilling guests of the county. Frankly, we'd rather be free.

What I'd Like To Forget

I like to forget the bad choices I made in life. I will also like to forget all the things I put my mom through. My reason for that is all the bad choices I made in life. I could have been someone right now. I could be living the good life and not the bad life. That my reason.

-Antonio B5

From The Beat: You ARE somebody. If you are truly sorry about what you've put your mom through, then stop doing those things. If the bad choices you've made in life have put you in a spot you don't want to be, then start making better choices. But never forget that you are already somebody.

Pray For Me

W'assup, Beat? I'm doing cool. Can't wait until my court date on September 25 for trial. I'm going to lose my step, 'cause the staff played me. Man, I hate it when there's a high count in here, not enough food for everyone. Starving in here. Pray for me. Hopefully I won't lose the trial and they send me to CYA.

-Weapon B4

From The Beat: Of course we hope they don't send you to CYA. But whether you win or lose your trial, what are your plans after you leave lock-up? It seems to us that you should be thinking farther into the future than just this trial. What are you planning to do to avoid trials in the future?

A Joke

Once, a little boy's mom said, "I want you to come straight home from Sunday school." The little boy was in school and his teacher asked the class, "Does anybody want to go to heaven?" Everybody raised their hand except for the lil' boy, so the teacher asked, "You don't wanna go to heaven?" Then he said, "No 'cause my mama told me to come straight home from Sunday school."

-Rodnika GU

From The Beat: Thanks for the laugh!

I Feel Like I'm A Be Here Forever

Cito runs thangs in the halls, if I can do it on the outs. I don't know. I can't wait to be free. I've been here six months now, and it is not crackin'. I feel like I'm gonna be here forever. The pulchritude that I see just can't go away.

-Cito B4

From The Beat: You will be out soon, so just keep being patient. We think you're pretty pulchritudinous too...

War

Turf on turf, barrio on barrio
War on each other — that's what I'm ready for
Country on country, state on state
But it's city on city in the Golden State
Youngstas aged ten and up
On the turf, keeping it true and not giving a what
Teenage 'hood stars, veteranos, block monstas and OGs
Who lace to Peewees to BGs, Young Gs and new booties
Gangbangas, dope slangas, gun bustas, ain't no suckas
You want war? Then do something, sucka
Young bucks going crazy on the block
Where it is hot we duck the cops
And shake the spots

-Lil' Shadow B4

From The Beat: We have to tell you that we think it's a real shame, a total waist of a good brain, that someone with your intelligence and skills (with words) is so willing to throw away his precious freedom (and perhaps even more) for the war that you celebrate in this piece. You say you're ready for it, but are you ready to spend years as a slave to the system as a consequence? Are you ready to lose parts of your body, or even your ability to walk on your own, eat on your own, pee on your own in case you take a bullet to the spine? Are you ready to have part of your brain blown away in this war you say you're so ready for? All these things have happened to friends of ours (and all had thought it couldn't possibly happen to them), so don't pretend these aren't real possibilities. The time to think about these possibilities — and the ways to avoid them — is before they happen.

Dear Bra

What's up with you? Man me, been stressing hella much since you been gone, but you know I'ma rida and I can make it do wat it do. Bra I wish you wus out here wit' me so me so you can see all da stuff you missin'... I wish you could see all da money we stackin', wish you could see ma new wifey Erica. Yeah, I know you surprised as hell 'bout dat. Neva thought a girl could become ma wifey 'cause you know how we used ta do!!

But bra, I wish you could see all the cars, scrapers, caddies, and vans and ducs. Bra, when you first left, I was so mad at you. All I wanted to do was kick yo' ass and cuss you out! Bra, me and you was 'posed to be together for days to come, but now I see it won't happen that way, maybe not physically but mentally fo' sho. You'll always be wit' cho boy!

I'm turning 18 in a few weeks. Yup, finally, and you can't be there, but when you did wat you did you wasn't thinking 'bout that so forget you too! Naw, jus' playing bra. You know I love you and ma love won't never change.

So, till the day we meet again, I'ma be thinking 'bout you every day. Save a spot for me fo when I get up there. Rest in peace "OG" 1985-2006 Bra's fa life.

-J-B B5

From The Beat: We're sorry you have to bear the pain of losing your brother to the streets. But we're curious about a couple of things. First, what makes you so sure that the spot you're asking him to save for you is "up there"? What if it's down there? You still want that spot? And second, what would you honestly do if your brother were able to talk to you directly right now, and he told you to lay it down, put it behind you, choose a different path? What if he said, "Yeah, I liked all that shhh we did, but I like life a lot more than this. I wish... If only..."? Would you honor his wish? Since you're turning 18, we hope you give this the adult thought it deserves, and not just continue down a path that started when you were a child and thought as a child.

'Dro

I write almost the same thing every week. I'm running out of things to talk about, but for some reason, talking about 'dro never gets tiring.

-Cito B4

From The Beat: That's what all addicts say about the things they're addicted to. For the sex addict, it's never tiring to talk about sex. For the street addict, it's never tiring to talk about the streets. And for the pot head...

Living Wit' War

Man, what it do, Beat? This ya boy, M Beezy. Any living wit' war ain't bad. I does that stuff to the bone. That 'hood living ain't easy, so I tell a ninja if he got a problem, then bring the beef. Y'all know where I be, so that how war start — just by ninjas trying to act hard. Shhh, get it started.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: Seems to us that you are just one of those people you describe, "ninjas trying to act hard." And what has it brought you?

What I'd Like To Forget

I would like to forget about my case — what I did and why I'm here in the first place. I would forget about ma bra Nitro getting killed and how it happen to him. Every day I think about Bra like, damn, he really gone an' I can't do nothin' 'bout it. But in ma heart he still alive.

Mentally it hurt 'cause it seem like me an' him was just with our females the other day, but it just ma mind playing tricks on me And that shhh happen so sick 'cause I was just on the phone wit' him. I told ma mom, "Let him use ma phone 'cause I can't use it 'cause I'm in here."

The next day I called my female an' we called ma phone on the three-way an' it just was ringin'. So I called one of the homies an' he told me. Oh ma God! I flipped the hell out. I pray every night for ma bra an' ma family.

I see y'all next time y'all slide through.

-Al-Bundy B5

From The Beat: It's tragic to lose a brother at whatever age and under whatever circumstances. To lose one like this... well, we don't know how we would maintain in your situation. We hope the combination of this terrible loss and the circumstances that brought you into the hall this time will be enough to make you look carefully at the way you are living, and make some decisions that will keep you out of places like this, for real.

A Retired Soldier

The war that I'm living in right now is very disturbing. Seeing all of us people of color being labeled as criminals, lost, nothing but losers. This war that I'm fighting is in my own community where I'm not welcomed by some because I'm not what they want or make me to be.

When you do something positive, the people above you think it wasn't you who did it and they talk negatively about you. But when you do something negative, they give you praise and promote your wrong doing 'cause that what they were waiting for, your mess up.

But holla back. I'm getting out in the morning.

-Reese-C-Cup B5

From The Beat: Damn, Josh, we're going to miss you in our workshop. But congratulations for getting out of here. If we ever see your behind back in this place, we plan to kick it! Good luck!

Life Of War

What's up Beat readers? What's crackin? This that vato Goofy once again still in max unit letting time pass by.

Well, I think us as gang members live our lives in a constant war all day, every day. We gotta stay trucha for rivals at all times 'cause you just never know if it's gonna go down. When rivals come to my block I gotta stand tall through it all until they run off my block and run back to their block. I've been doing this for a long time and I'm kind of used to it. But I gotta go 'cause times up for me. Keep trucha at all times Al Rato

-Goofy B5

From The Beat: Are you used to being locked up? Are you used to having bullets inside you? Are you used to seeing homies get buried? What will it take for you to get used to something else?

My favorite Cartoon Character

Sponge Bob Square Pants is my favorite cartoon character because he's funny and he reminds me of my son. I like the way he laughs, I like the way he acts. I also like the way he's best friend with Patrick the Star. The thing me and him have in common is that I can be stupid like him, I do have someone that I aggravate like Squidward, and he is also my favorite color.

Winnie the Pooh is my favorite because he's a stuffed bear which is my most favorite thing, and he eats honey, which also my favorite thing. He's snuggle and cute and very sweet. And what we have in common is we love honey.

-Poohdah Bear GU

From The Beat: Go Sponge Bob and Winnie the Pooh! Did you ever read Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne? It's a wonderful book.

Ebony

My favorite cartoon character is Ebony. Y'all might not know her but know that she does exist. I like her because she real, that's what I mostly recognize about her. She my favorite cartoon character because we alike. Her main concern is her family, just like me. Then she about that dough, just like me. So I consider her as a goon instead of a 'toon, therefore she my favorite goon character.

-Muck GU

From The Beat: So both of you are about that dough, and neither of you is putting in your pockets... Hmmm. Maybe it's time for both you and your favorite goon character to change how it is you get your money so that it doesn't keep going into the pockets of the system.

My Favorite Cartoon Character

My favorite cartoon character is Bart Simpson of The Simpson because he's bad and he always be getting suspended from school like me. And he don't listen to his parents. He's a disobedient child or boy who don't like to follow his parents and school rules. And he likes to pull lots of tricks on his principal just like me. That why I think Bart Simpson is my favorite character.

-Rodnika GU

From The Beat: So, what kind of tricks do you pull on your principal? There's one big difference between you and Bart... whatever Bart does or no matter how much he gets into trouble, he won't be placed in jail and he'll never have to worry about his future because Bart Simpson is made up to entertain people. On the other hand, you, and what you do in life, will affect your future. We love Bart too, but we don't want to be him.

A Fan

Just let it be known to ere'body out dere, Reese-C-Cup is the rawest in Madden '04, '05, '06 and '07. I had to strap the homie Foster in Madden with them Redskins 10-0. In two minute quarters, he had the Patriots. We could play for money, Girbauds, whatever.

-Reese-C-Cup B5

From The Beat: We had to ask someone who follows football more than we do whether you were telling us you are a Redskins fan or a Patriots fan. We guess it's the Redskins, but since we're not sure, we just named the piece, "A Fan."

Living With War

What's it do Beat? This be that vato Cartoon from San Francisco. Today I will be talking 'bout living at war. Every day you need to trucha. You never know if you ganna go home that night. Every day me or one of my homies gets into a fight. You always gotta watch your back. Can't leave your back to the streets or you might catch a bullet. And when enemies come to my barrio my homies and me get down no matter how many there are, and you never leave a homie behind.

A'right. I got to go. Alrato.

-Cartoon B5

From The Beat: You paint a very attractive picture of the life you lead, Cartoon. We just can't wait to live the same way, fighting every day, worried about "enemies" (that look and talk just like you do), and making sure that we protect a block that doesn't belong to us and couldn't care less whether we make it or not. Oh yes, very attractive indeed!

How I Feel About Love

How I feel about love. Man, let me tell you love is something you got when you meet somebody that really love you and would do anything for you.

Man, I had this girl. She was the one for me. But now she left me with a hole in my heart. That's how I feel about love. I hope everybody feel me. Stay down.

-Flat Head B5

From The Beat: We're sorry you lost your love, Flat Head. But we know enough about love to tell you for sure that the hole in your heart will be filled when you fall in love the next time.

My Loving Grandma

I would like to forget the time when my grandma passed away. She was my only grandma I was close to. She did anything for me. I can ask her and talk to her about anything, and if she had it, she will give it to me.

She is my favorite grandmother I ever had. She taught me a lot of things. She taught me how to cook too, so when I'm on my own, I don't have to keep buying something to eat.

She died at a young age. She was like 48 or 49. I wish she would live longer. I really miss her. I love you grandma.

-Berty B5

From The Beat: We're sorry your beloved grandma passed away, but consider it a blessing that you had her for as long as you did. When you think about how many young people have nobody that cares for them as much as your grandma cared for you, then you know how lucky you were. What kind of things did she teach you to cook?

Living In War, And Getting Out

Gang war, mayne its crazy having to watch yo' back all the time, make sure you don't get yo' head pop. I mean there are a lot of ways of getting out of it for real. Like going to school and getting a education, going somewhere in life, or just getting away from the scene the block whatever, you dig.

-J B2

From The Beat: Do you have the desire to stop the war going on with you? Do you want an education? What are you going to do to go somewhere in life?

War Is Stupid

War is stupid to me. Like I live in Hunter Point and beef started over record deals. It just no matter what their age is, they get killed over petty stupid things. You know I can't explain it. I don't know.

-Darlene GU

From The Beat: It is hard to explain, Darlene, whether it's war in the streets of San Francisco or war in the streets of Baghdad. Why do you think that some things (whether record deals or oil) are more important than human lives? (We had to take out all your references to street names and places — in order to avoid war!)

My Favorite Cartoon Character

My favorite cartoon character is Muck, 'cause she's really funny and keeps a smile on her face. She also have long pretty hair. She has plenty of stories for kids, and she always shows that she has plenty of love for her loved ones. She stay keeping it gutta aka keeping it real. She's very outspoken no matter what. That's what big dogs do. She also easy to get along with but will switch up real quick, ya dig. That's why she's my favorite cartoon character.

-Ebony GU

From The Beat: E, when you were describing this favorite cartoon character of yours, did you see in some way describing yourself? Did you ever think to yourself, "Hey, she's like me" even though Muck is only a cartoon character?

It just no matter what their age is, they get killed over petty stupid things.

Forget

To forget my time
To forget these last few months
To forget this food would be an ultimate relief
To forget the endless sleepless nights I spent tossing
To forget the faces of the people I've hurt
To forget the pain of family who've passed on to a new journey
To forget that I will not be free, not really free, for a long time
To forget all my mistake
These are just a few of many things I would like to forget or even better, undo. But at the same time, these are the things that, for better or worse, make me… well me.
Thanks to the nurses and doctors for taking care of me.

-Zoltan B5

From The Beat: Yes, these are some of the things that make you you, but there so much more that has gone into who you are. We wish we had more time to get to really know you — but not if that time is spent behind these walls! You don't have to forget any of this... just avoid it in the future!

Erase

What I want to erase in my mind is the people I played in life. The way I treated them and the things I've done to them — words that I called them really hurt them. Wish I could just erase all that in my mind.

-Uce Panther B2

From The Beat: It's big of you to want to erase that from your mind, but what about erasing it from the minds of those you hurt? Have you made an attempt to tell any of these people just what you told us? How will you try to keep yourself from hurting any more people in the future?

Favorite Cartoon Character

I don't have a favorite character for cartoons but be feelin' Stewie (Family Guy). But yeah, that shhh is hella funny. The Boondocks is coo' too. The show is hella down to earth like fo' real, fo' real but it relates to life a lot, so that's why I like it.

-J B2

From The Beat: We also like those cartoons. What cartoon character do you relate to most? Which particular episode did you like the best?

Patrick From Sponge Bob

My favorite cartoon is Patrick from Sponge Bob. The reason why I like him is because he is very, very funny. Even through he acts dumb and does dumb things, he still is funny.

-Carl LCRS

From The Beat: What kind of dumb things does the starfish Patrick do to make you laugh?

Two Weeks Dead Time Is Not Forever

What it do, Beat? This be that ninja, Young Jeff, here at the Ranch. Just now caught two weeks of dead time, but it's nothin', 'cause I'm a be out one day, but I'm here doin' my do.

Well, my daughter is now two months old on August 29th, but I'm 'bout to write about what I'd like to forget—it's about my time, 'cause the more I think about it, the more it seems like a long time, but, yeah, that's it. I'm be Young Jeff.

-Young Jeff LCRS

From The Beat: Can you just make sure your dead time doesn't become a dead life, Young Jeff? Dead time isn't necessarily time you have to kill, as in, I'm just killing time... What can you do during those two weeks more you now have to spend at the Ranch, as well as during the completion of your basic program, that can be productive? Do it for your child!

Why Do People Kill?

People kill because they're scared to fight
Because they feel bad about themselves
People kill 'cause they want to be known
People kill for a whole bunch of reasons
But you will never know why
Because you are not in their minds

-Cash B LCRS

From The Beat: You cover some reasons people kill others, Cash B, yet we wish you could have shared some solutions to stopping this hate. We know folks who have don't just that, and now regret it to the fullest as they sit in prison for life, throwing away their freedom.

My Son

My son. I wish she could have had him, but she didn't. She aborted my son, so forget her.

-De Sean LCRS

From The Beat: Easy De Sean! That's not cool to say "forget her!" Where's the support? Are you truly mature enough to have a child? Wake up! We do not know the circumstances, but we do know where you sit tonight and we have a pretty good idea how old you are too. Sounds to us like she was a bit more responsible when it came down to making a choice, especially given what you say about her in your one sentence.

To My Wife

How you been, mija? I hope okay. You know, today I was thinkin' about you. I love you so much that you always in my mind. Love, how often I love you without seeing, without remembering you. I love you. And when I die, I want your hands on my eyes. You must know that I do not love and that I love you because I love my barrio. But also I love you. My love has two lives in order to love you. That's why I love you when I do not love you. Dedicated to Mitzy. One love to all.

- Slow Pain LCRS

From The Beat: You have the heart of a poet. Why don't you write The Beat Within how your two loves can sometimes compete for your heart? How do you manage it when your lady wants to go somewhere with you, but your homies want you to hang with them?

I'm Trying To Put My Life Together

Yea, what it do, Beat? Me, shhh, just here at the Ranch, trying to put my life together any way I can. I ain't doing anything for nobody but my baby girl, because that's the only one I have to do it for.

But, anyways, I've been here since 12/2/05 and it is 9/1/06 and this Ranch program is seven months and two weeks, but now I got to do, like, a year and eight months.

But shhh happens for a reason—that's how I look at it. I just keep my head up and don't let this time get to me. My big homies used to tell me all the time—"We will make it anywhere, as long as we stay together." Well, got to go.

-Lil' Gambino LCRS

From The Beat: Hey Lil' Gambino we appreciate the piece and honesty. We hope someday very soon you see that what your big homies told you is not true. Why do we say this 'cause as long as you continue to get into trouble, the homies will be forced to stay a part. You know, some will leave the life, some will be incarcerated, some me even meet their fate. There's plenty of reasons why homies have a hard time staying together. How's your relationship with your family?

Racist People

What's up to all? Bueno, I'm hella mad. I gotta be at this weak camp. Always getting write-ups, you know—people think that I am racist, but you know if you in a weak camp like this, you always going to be mad for whatever.

People think that all my brown homies are racist because we always get in trouble. But, you know, is because we Latinos, we a real criminals, and we all Latinos who represent one color, one number. But, to tell you the truth, some of my homies don't like others and are racist and I hang out with them too.

But, you know, I really hope one day people stop being racist. Love to all. A real brown pride.

- Slow Pain LCRS

From The Beat: Even though you have mad love for your homies in the set you represent, you are still a major problem when it comes to incarcerating and hurting brown people. But how can it make sense to hate on people from another set you consider enemies, who are mostly Latinos, even through you don't know many of them personally and they've never hurt you, but you disapprove of discriminating against someone else who you don't know, who is a member of another race? Both are strangers. Why should you ever let anyone else, including your homies, tell you who your enemies are or should be?

What I Like To Forget

Man treatin' one of my lil' bras the way I did, I never thought that was bad. I used to talk to him bad. Put him down all the time. I never took him nowhere. Just showed no type of affection towards him. And after a while I just thought like man, this shhh ain't cool. So that's the memory I wanna erase.

-J B2

From The Beat: We understand why you would want to erase that memory. Does that mean it'll be erased for your lil' bra too? What are you going to do to make it up to him?

She Was My Moon And Sun

Man, you know my girl has broke my heart, and now I am sad and I had loved her a lot, and we was going out for two years, and, man, you know I love her a lot. She was my moon and sun.

-Marcus LCRS

From The Beat: Getting your heart broken can hurt like no other pain. Over time your pain will heal and you will move on. Best to you, focus on your program.

My Baby Boy And Baby Mama

My little boy that I haven't seen. My baby mama that is my everything that I wished for. My little boy that will favor myself and his mother. My baby mama that is in the Walden House and she is getting out soon, and I am in the Ranch for seven months. But to let her know I will be on my way home in a couple of months, so when I get home, I will be there for ma baby boy.

My wifey to be—she will be my all and I will always be in your life forever. So, Baby, who will you be waiting for when I get home? And you always have a place in ma heart. While I am on this Ranch, make me a promise that you will love me and I will be your husband and you're ma wifey for life. And you know what our son name will be? Quincy Camoni Donte Johnson, I love you.

-Young Harlem LCRS

From The Beat: Was your son born since you've come down to the Ranch, Young Harlem? Congratulations! We're happy for you, especially fi you do everything in yoru power to love your son, and be the father you are suppose to be! But we wonder, why, when your lady was pregnant and now that she has a young baby, did you choose now to mess up and get sent to juvy and the Ranch? Doesn't your lady really need you right now? What's up with that? How is she managing with your newborn but without you?

My Favorite Cartoon

Well my favorite cartoon character is Hey Arnold. But I don't want my life to be a cartoon life. What I really want is for my family to be happy. All they do is argue and fuss but I want my mom not to cry no more over me.

-Young Sparkle B2

From The Beat: Have you told your mother how you feel? Maybe it would help to tell her everything you just told us, so she'll know how you feel about all of this. But it's just a suggestion. One thing for sure, though, even if you can't stop all the fussing and arguing, you can make a decision not to contribute to it.

She's Like Å Princess To Me

What's up, Beat Within? This is Anthony. I hope you like my new oldie, "I Need You In My Life" that was dedicated to a special girl. If it was not for her, I probably wouldn't think about that song. When I saw her, she was the most beautiful girl I ever seen in my life. I wrote her a couple letters—hopefully she got them. Hopefully I will see her again. She was like a princess to me. The last time I saw her was when she got released from the hall. She went to a group home. I got sad and then I got sent to LCR—Long Cabin Ranch. I was even more sad, so I did another oldie, called, "My Lady." Hopefully all my fans will like it, and, well, peace out. Much love to all the mijas (girls) and to my special girl.

-Anthony LCRS

From The Beat: We're sorry, but no one can write to or about anyone else in juvy, so we had to cut the name of the lovely girl who inspires you to write new songs. We hope, when you're both free again, you find each other.

The Boondocks Is Funny

The Boondocks good because they live with their granddad and they're bad. They be doing crazy stuff, like having fights with people on the streets. And they be going bad on they granddad and it be funny.

-Jeff B4

From The Beat: Yeah, we like The Boondocks too. But it comes on too late at night for us. We're already asleep!

Bullets Don't Have No Names

(The Beat Within Interviews Lil' R, with an addition by Anthony)
TBW: Hi, Lil' R.
Lil' R: Hi.
TBW: What do you feel like being interviewed about today?
Lil' R: I wanna call it (the interview) "Bullets Don't Have No Names."
TBW: Okay.
Lil' R: I feel bullets don't have no names, but it (the likelihood of getting shot) increases with certain people you're around—like my rivals. There's a lotta places I can't go in San Francisco, because of (I belong to) my gang. It's crazy. I can't go anywhere I wanna go. It's a small city. I can only go to my block, to a few blocks near my block. I can't go almost anywhere in San Francisco, in Stockton, Sacramento, Vallejo, Oakland because of my affiliation.
TBW: So you don't go out of your area?
Lil' R: I still do, but I get into fights… My enemies can't go out of their turf either. One of my cousins from the rival gang got shot in arm. He shouldn't have been there. He was hangin' with the enemies. He knew he was in our turf.
TBW: But it's a free country. Why can't you go anywhere in this city, any city in this country you want? Why can't your cousin go anywhere he wants?
Anthony: Never. It's not a free country. If it was a free country, you could do whatever you want. We wouldn't be in here.
TBW: But what if your cousin was just hungry? Why shouldn't he be able to go to McDonald's to get a hamburger any time he wants?
Lil' R: He can't go to the McDonald's in our turf. If he does, he knows he's gonna get shot. There's a McDonald's near where he lives. He can go there.
TBW: But why can't he go to any Mc Donald's he wants to in this country? The same for you? Isn't it ridiculous you can't go most places in San Francisco? Isn't it ridiculous that you can only go to the McDonald's near your house, and if you go to the McDonald's near your cousin's house, you risk getting shot?
Lil' R: It is ridiculous. But that's just the way it is. You go to a enemy's area, you gonna get shot. Same for me.
TBW: How do you feel about your cousin getting shot?
Lil' R: I feel bad, but I didn't do it (shoot him) so it's nothin'. He knew he shouldn't be there. So, whateva.
TBW: What if your cousin had been killed, trying to buy a hamburger?
Lil' R: Well, I don't want it to happen, because I love my cousin, but he know he not s'pposed to be there. They made the decision to live in a small box. They made the decision to join a gang.
TBW: What about you? You're out there facing the same problems.
Lil' R: Same like me. Yes, there's prostitution, pimping, drug using, drug dealing, gangs, kids going to jail, kids carrying guns, shootings, killings, but I'm not a girl. I'm not into prostitution. But I'm doing those other things—using drugs, selling drugs, carrying a gun…
TBW: Why are you out there?
Lil' R: I'm a hot boy. It's like a roller coaster for me—runnin' from cops, shooting guns…
TBW: You like shooting guns?
Lil' R: Yeah, I like shooting guns.
TBW: Why?
Lil' R: Because my frustrations, my anger.
TBW: What are you angry about?
Lil' R: I'm angry about being in this world because I think it's better being dead than alive. You gotta worry about a lot of things—my rivals, how to get a meal, money to survive…
TBW: If you were starving, wouldn't your family feed you?
Lil' R: I wouldn't go home.
TBW: Why not?
Lil' R: That's my life. That's what I do best.
TBW: So when you get out of here, you're going right back to the block?
Lil' R: I'm going into the military.
TBW: Really? Why?
Lil' R: Because I got nowhere to stay, so I'm gonna go there.
TBW: You can't go home?
Lil' R: I don't got no home. I got nowhere to stay.
TBW: What about your mom's home. Aren't you welcome there?
Lil' R: My mom's got nowhere to stay.
TBW: Why not? What's happened? You used to stay with her.
Lil' R: Not no more. I heard she got nowhere to stay.
TBW: What about your brothers and sisters? Don't you have an older brother and sister you wrote about (for The Beat)?
Lil' R: Yeah.
TBW: Can't you stay with one of them?
Lil' R: They don't have nowhere to stay either. They're not that much older than I am. I'm gonna be seventeen. My brother's eighteen, sister's nineteen. Maybe they're staying with our auntie.
TBW: So you're going to join the Navy? You're just going to go sign up?
Lil' R: I already did.
TBW: What? When?
Lil' R: A week ago. I put my name, date of birth, education, grades (in school), everything on the paper and sent it in. I mailed it to them. I should be finding out what's up.
TBW: So you know the Navy's going to send you straight to Iraq. Are you ready for that?
Lil' R: I don't think so. It's most likely the army and Marines that are going to Iraq.
TBW: So you're joining the Navy but you don't think they're going to send you to Iraq? What do you think is going to happen to you? All the armed services are having trouble reaching their quotas every month, to get new recruits to send to Iraq. Why don't you think they'll send you there?
Lil' R: They're probably going to train me to be an engineer.
TBW: What makes you think that? Did you talk to a Navy recruiter?
Lil' R: No.
TBW: Did you put on your application that you want to be an engineer?
Lil' R: No.
TBW: Do you want to be an engineer?
Lil' R: Whatever they want me to do, I'll just do what I gotta do.
TBW: When do you get out of here? Off the Ranch?
Lil' R: December.
TBW: What if the Navy sends you to Iraq?
Lil' R: Then I gotta go. I gotta do what I gotta do.
TBW: Do you like ships?
Lil' R: I just wanna try something different. I just gotta get away.

-Lil' R LCRS

From The Beat: We've learned more about you from your interview than we've ever known about you from your writing before for The Beat, Lil' R. Thank you for the honest interview. You sound like you've thought a lot about your present life, who you really are, and where your life was going if you didn't change it radically. Good for you for having the honesty and courage to go in another direction. That's real talk. So far George Bush says he intends to keep the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq going as long as he's president, so if you sign those papers and join the Navy, there's no way of knowing how long your obligation to the Navy will be. Many servicemen now are having their terms of duty extended without their approval. But maybe the Navy will train you in all kinds of practical skills that will interest you, that you can work into a career when you're a back in civilian life again. We all wish you the best.

SANTA CRUZ

Me And The System

Well, this is my tenth time here, and well, it's getting kind of old. Same as me. I will turn 18 in a few days, and I want to leave the system behind, if it's possible. I don't want anyone to tell me what to do all the time… when to go to bed, when to eat, and when to relieve myself. But when I get out, if I get out, I will try to stay out and be with my family.

So, until next time Beat…

-Edgar

From The Beat: You are still young, but you don't have to be loc (which we cut out). Get serious about your life. You have a fine brain. Start using it to educate yourself. We know that you are a very bright guy. But you have to take that big brain of yours and use it to educate yourself.

I want to leave the system behind, if it's possible

Biggest Disappointment

The biggest disappointment in my life is the justice system, because The United States says it stands for fairness and equality, but it failed me and my family. It constantly puts stress on my family. So, from me to you, just trust yourself and stay in school and get a job. Alrato!

-Brett

From The Beat: We wish you'd listened to yourself before you landed in juvy. Your job now is to work hard to improve yourself, to educate yourself. Ask your teacher for the names of two important books to read. Then ask your parents or someone in a position to help to get those books for you. After you've read them, ask for the names of two more important books. etc, etc. etc.

Where Have You Been And Where Are You Going?

Hey Beat. I do not know where I am going to go. My lawyer told me I'd be here for a month and then I might get to go home with my family. If I go home I need to do good. If not, I come back here for more time. I don't want to do more time. I need to be with my baby and my girlfriend. So, I hope to leave soon and see my family again. I want to start a new life, with no problems.

-Rene'

From The Beat: So, you know where you need to be. Good behavior will get you there. Minute by minute – be good.

It constantly puts stress on my family. So, from me to you, just trust yourself and stay in school and get a job.

Puppet On Strings

I feel like a puppet on strings
Why is this boy doing this to me
What is love
Why can't he let me be

Oh shhh, I can't even breathe
I sometimes just want to jump
In the sea

Don't you see I'm like a puppet
On strings

You think I just another bitch
You can put on your
Team

Boy please
Don't you see I have a life-long
Dream

So stop treating me like a puppet on
Strings

-Jeannie M

From The Beat: Relationships can make you feel like a puppet on a string sometimes. But it's not a good way to feel because it means your emotions are at the mercy of someone outside yourself. So, if you feel like you're being played by this boy, you probably are. Boys can be like that.

Flashbacks Of Me And You

You left me in a world of darkness
How would I carry on
What was I to do
Never ending memories
Flashbacks
Of
Me
And
You

-Kalisa

From The Beat: Are you having flashbacks because you are temporarily separated, or is this a permanent separation? We're guessing that he left you for the next life. If so, you have our sympathy.

Favorite Cartoon Character

Whoa! I know I sound stupid, yo, but I love cartoons! I like The Simpsons, Boondocks, Adult Swim, Cartoon Network — everything. I wish I could stay a kid (even though I get my grown women on!).

I love comics (what can I say? I'm an old G wit' it), all types of shhh… I like football (who seen the Seattle vs. Oakland game?). I like basketball too… Man, I wish I could play Madden '06 + 25 to life… Have y'all played the Godfather?

-Crakhead

From The Beat: We don't even know what the Godfather is (unless you mean the book and movie…) Do you have a favorite cartoon character? Which one?

Take What You Want

Yo, what up Beat? It's Crakhead Maria from SF/YGC! Yeah, well I'm here at the Walden House bein' a straight fool. So glad The Beat has followed me here!

Um… I live wit' war every day, man, and that's real talk. You gotta protect what you got. Somebody got somethin' and they don't need it, you gonna take it, right? You hungry an ya' girl got three donuts. You gonna take it, right? See, you do what you gotta do… by any means necessary. Das jus' my mentality…

But anyway, what I heard, Iraq gotta lotta oil… enough to share. But we don't wanna pay… we gon take it 'cause we want it… get it? It's like forget what you got if I ain't got nothin'! It at war B, an' that's that.

-Crakhead

From The Beat: We're not too impressed with your "mentality." If everyone just took what they wanted when they wanted, how could anything ever function? If you are comparing your mentality with the U.S. government's war in Iraq (for oil), that's fair. But if you are trying to justify stealing because the U.S. government steals, then we're here to say that both you and the government is wrong! We can't change you or the government, and you can't change the government. But you can change yourself. We hope you do.

You pushin' yourself away

Telling me you gone hate it when I leave
I need you to know that our friendship will never end
Do you believe me?
You need to, 'cause there ain't no other mix chick
That can put that smile on yo' face
You the only one I trust other than my man
The only one that put a smile on my face
Feelin' so hurt, ready to run away
Tellin' me to stop, think about the people you hurting
Do it for Mr. Littles
I smile and give you a giggle
You need to know our friendship will never go
It's just the beginning when we walk out them doors
So remember to hold yourself up so we can meet our every goal
I'd never had a friend that wants to be clean and sober like me
That's why I don't want to leave, but I need to go
So I can start my new life
You'll be out of here soon if you do right
Your smile brightens my day
You been there for me when my life would seem it's fallin' apart
Didn't know which way to run
A friendship I found when I thought I lost everything else
I love you and I know you love me too
Stop thinkin' I'ma do you wrong
I'm not that bad friend, this is something new
Don't ever forget me, stop pushin' yourself away
Just because I'm leavin' out this house, it doesn't mean I'm leavin' out yo' life
You got to be there when Mr. little make me his wife

-Els Littles

From The Beat: Sometimes we think that friendship is even more important than love, because love tends to make us see things through rose-colored glasses (we see what we want to see), but friendship is built on a stronger foundation. So we hope your friend treats this poem respectfully, and understands that your friendship is real. Good luck on the outs.

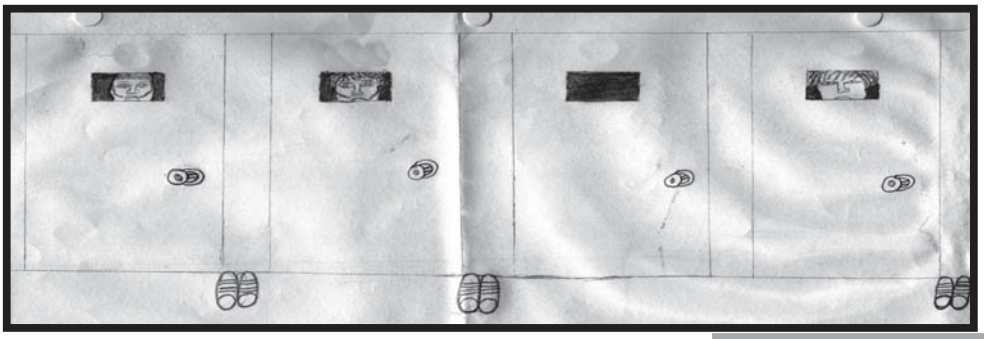
What I Like To Forget

Gee whiz, y'all sho do know how to hit all the topics… I wish I could have waited before losin' my virginity. That was one value I lost. I wish it neva happen.

For all you boys, please respect females.

-Crakhead

From The Beat: On this topic, we're with you 100%. The problem with expecting boys to respect females is that boys are still boys. They haven't learned to be men yet. So maybe you weren't respecting yourself as much as you should have.



No Past No Future

There isn't anything I'd want to erase from my past. A lot of shhh has happened to me, but it has made me who I am today, and I wouldn't wanna change that. There are things that piss me off, like getting arrested. And yeah, if I could, I'd take that back. But what's happened, happened. Can't change it now. and stressin' about it all the time just messes you up. No past no future.

-Slug

From The Beat: You're right about the fact that the past is done, and nothing can erase it. But there's a difference between stressing about the past, and learning from it. What have you learned from your past that is going to make your future better?

Love Of duping, Blood Of Pain

The love that I have for you will neva go away, but I learned to let it go.
I got people I like that I want to love, so please let me go with someone else.
People that may like me, so I need to give it back

-Delores

From The Beat: We don't know who you are addressing in this sad poem, but why do you need this person's permission to move on?

I'd never had a friend that wants to be clean and sober like me

Cartoon Character

My fav cartoon character is Arnold off of "Hey, Arnold" because he go dumb. He be running thangs and that beezy Helga always on his line. But I also like Stewie off "Family Guy" because he hella bad. But Tom and Jerry go dummy.

-Jazz'ah Belle

From The Beat: Tom and Jerry! Damn. You're going way back! Yeah, Stewie makes s laugh.

If You Leave Them, They'll Leave You

Never leave the one you love for the one you like 'cause the one you like will leave you for the one they love.

-Lil' Skizz

From The Beat: There's not a lot here for us to comment on. Is this the voice of experience talking?

Por Las Drogas

Yo lo que sé es que cuando use crystal, me prendi y desde entonces toda mi vida empezo a cambiar. Empece teniendo problemas por no llegar a mi casa. Ahi fue cuando me prendi tuve muchos problemas y termine en la juvenil. Me pesaron a testiar y salía sucio. Por eso les aconsejo que nunca hagan drogas.

From the Beat: Esta droga que estas usando es muy adictiva y destructive. Deberías de hacer lo posible para dejar de usar. Mucha gente han perdido demaciado en sus vidas por culpa de esta droga. Si no puedes salirte solo, deberías de buscar ayuda porque los resultados pueden ser bien drásticos.

Because Of The Drugs

What I know is that when I use crystal, I got hooked and ever since then, my whole life started to change. I started having problems for not coming home. That's when I got hooked and started having problems, and I ended up in Juvenile. They started testing me and I came out dirty. That's why I advise y'all to never use drugs.

-Erivan, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: That drug that you were using is very addictive and destructive. You should do whatever is possible in order to stop using. Many people have lost a lot in their lives because of this drug. If you can't quit on your own, you should seek help because the result could be real drastic if you don't.

Si La Vida Vale La Pena Vivirla

La vida vale la pena vivir porque asi nos dejo Dios en el mundo para hacer algo. Para algunas personas, no les vale la pena vivir y esas personas son las que estan metido en las drogas y eso es dificil de salirse.

Eso es lo que hací antes pero ahora es tiempo de dejar las cosas tontas. Cuando salga de aqui voy a trabajar, ganar un poco de dinero e ir a la iglesia.

Hay dolor que me dolio haberlo visto. Cuando estaba en mi pais, vi a un niño que lo mato una camioneta.

From The Beat: ¿Cual crees que sea el proposito que Dios te trajo a este mundo? Deberías de intentar saber cual es y disfrutarla a lo máximo que puedas. Esperamos que lo que dices aqui no sean solo palabras y que lleguen a ser hechos. Nos imaginamos que fue algo terrible haber visto morir de esa manera a un niño. Esto y muchas cosas pueden pasar cuando los manejadores no se fijan al manejar. Por eso hay que siempre cuidar a sus niños.

Yes, Life Is Worth Living

Life is worth living because that's how God left us in the world to do something. For some people, they don't care if they live, and those people are the ones who are involved in drugs and that is difficult to get out of.

That is what I did before, but now it's time to leave all the dumb things behind. When I get out of here, I am going to work, earn some money, and go to church.

There's pain that hurt me to have seen. When I was in my country, I saw a boy that was killed by a truck.

-Calixtoo, Marin

From The Beat: What do you believe is the purpose for which God brought you to this world? You should attempt to find out what that purpose is and enjoy it to the fullest. We hope that what you are saying in this piece are not just words, but eventually turn into actions. We imagine that it must have been terrible to witness how that young boy was killed in that manner. This and many other things can happen when the drivers are not focused on what they're doing. That's why we always have to take care of our kids.

I am tired of doing bad things. I want to make my life good, work, and earn a bit of cash. I also want to help my family out.

Odiar A Alguien

Pues como dicen, para que vas a odiar a alguien si no lo conoces. Si conoces a esa persona y te dice algo que no te gusta, que te duela el corazón puedes llegar a odiarla. También puedes odiar a alguién si te dicen algo o que te quiten a tu novia.

Yo no conozco a alguien afuera, pero cuando entre aqui conoci amigos.

Cuando me la paso afuera me la paso usando drogas y tomando. Voy a estar afuera. Estoy cansado de hacer cosas malas. Quiero hacer mi vida bien, trabajar, y ganar un poco de dinero. También quiero ayudar a mi familia. Tengo que buscarme una novia bien chida. Quiero pasarmela con mi familia y no ser como antes

From The Beat: Hay muchas manera como poder odia alguién, pero lo bueno es prevenir odiar y que te odien. ¿No crees? ¿Odias a alguién por x razonez? ¿Y si si, de donde vino ese odio? Sobre lo que quieres hacer, sabemos que puedes hacerlo siempre y cuando lo desees de corazón. No hay nadie quien te detenga amenos que dejes que tus malas influencias te guien. Suerte, "si se puede."

To Hate Someone

Well, like they say, why are you going to hate someone if you don't know that person? If you know that person and that person tells you something that you don't like, and it hurts your heart, you could end up hating that person. You can also hate someone if they tell you something or they take your girlfriend from you.

I know someone on the outs, but when I came in here, I met some friends.

When I spend my time on the outs, I spend my time using drugs and drinking. I am going to be on the outs. I am tired of doing bad things. I want to make my life good, work, and earn a bit of cash. I also want to help my family out. I need to find myself a really down girlfriend. I want to spend my time with my family and not be like before.

-Calixto, Marin

From The Beat: There are many ways you can hate someone, but the good thing is to prevent spreading hate and to have people hate you. You don't believe? Do you hate someone for x reason? And if you do, where did this hatred come from? Regarding what you want to do, we know that you can always do this when you desire it with your heart. There's no one that can hold you back, except when you let bad influences guide you. Good luck to you and, "Yes, you can do it."

FRANK RAMOS

Nobody goes through as many Beat names as our next gifted writer, Frank Ramos (who placed first in our most recent editor's writing contest). Formerly The Kid, Solomon, and few others we can't remember, he is now "The Kon Artist." But what he writes here is no con at all. Like us, he is frustrated when he reads young writers with great poetic skills misusing their talents to teach lessons that can only lead to death and destruction, imprisonment and pain. So, in Part 1, he shows how easy it is to create a flow without thought to what the flow is teaching. In Part 2, he lays it all out. And, as always, every word is worth reading. The Kon Artist pens his poetry from the R.J. Donavan State Prison in San Diego, CA.

MASSacre!

Part 1

I've been accused of many things, now add manslaughter
to that list...
This is not only murder, but also the massacre that he
writ!
You want war? Let's start war.. This art form is heart born
Straight hard-core, real, raw and uncut, you numb nut
Get with it, I'm wicked, straight gifted and twisted
I live it, you talk it... just stop it!
You shot but you missed...
Now you're just part of the massacre that he writ!
Face it, you're basic, just average, I ravage, straight savage
So tribal my rivals are all pronounced dead on arrival!
Admit it, I'm sick wit' it, I probably need to be admitted
It's undeniable, I'm certifiable, liable to lose it any minute!
Straight gorilla in the mist...
In the massacre that he writ!
I drop hammers, my grammar is grander than most!
But now it's time to use it for something else than just to
boast!

Part 2

You see, it's easy to pt these rhymes together
You just have to be patient and maybe a lil' clever
And when you think it sounds smooth
Keep lookin' for ways to make it better
But this is the thing —
Next time you have the pen and paper, I want you to think,
I want you to know
I want you to realize it's not just for show!
What you have in your hand is unlimited power!
The power to influence, the power to educate!
You see, it's an honor and privilege to be called a poet
But you self-proclaimed ones feed the propaganda and you
don't even know it!
It's okay, keep it hyphy, sport your Nikes
Wear your white Tees, it won't make you mighty!
But how dare you use the power of the prose
To feed that poison to the ones that matter the most!
From coast to coast, city to city, from the poor to the rich,
This here is the massacre, the massacre that he writ!
You see, I had a bone to pick and I picked it
Any time there's a problem with our youth we should fix it!
If you want retaliation, stand in line, I won't mind to bring
the ruckus
You see, I bust this for poetic justice!
Too many die before they ever really lived!
Just another casualty in the massacre that he writ!

Everyone is profiting from incarceration except the incarcerated and the lower class families of the incarcerated.

KENNETH FLOYD

Writing from the Apalachee Correctional Institution in Sneads, Florida, this is a young man with a long sentence, coming to the realization that he will be 43 years old when he's released. He writes, "I don't have a wife or kids and most likely at that age I probably won't have any kids, robbed of a family. The system don't try to fix people; they just want to lock everyone up and then let them out with nothing." He is serving time for crimes committed to support his drug addiction. And now that he's seen the light, he's lighting a fire underneath all of us to get up and stop letting these things happen to our families. Read on and see what he has to say.

Will We Ever Stand Up?

Over two-million are incarcerated in America. Will we ever come up with a solution other than incarceration? Why haven't we progressed past this? Minimum mandatory sentences, 85%, 10, 20, life, 3-strikes laws. Will we ever stand up and put a stop to this beast?

Everyone is profiting from incarceration except the incarcerated and the lower class families of the incarcerated. They subcontract the food services out to private corporations. They serve poor quality food with very little nutritional value. The private vendors in the canteen services sell all items at double or more of the price, putting a bigger burden on the incarcerated families, but if you can't buy food from the canteen you will not get the nutrition you need. Phone call prices are outrageous, putting another burden on our families.

Who profits? Not the incarcerated. It's legalized slavery, modern day concentration camps, profiting from warehousing the poor. Will we ever stand up and put a stop to this beast known as the criminal justice system?

BRIAN K.

Introduced to us by his cellie and great Beat teacher, Keith Smith, we bring to you this next writer who seems to be just as determined to reach the minds of our youth. 'The message' is the same one we hear over and over again, but it doesn't seem like anyone's taking heed to it. And Brian explains it in his own way. If we were to learn from one another's experiences, maybe life would be easier on us individually. Brian is writing from State Prison in San Diego, CA, and we're glad our dear friend introduced us.

The Message

Here I sit surrounded by four stone walls
Trapped with thoughts, emotions and pain from the past
Which I can no longer hide from
I cry out, but does anyone hear the screams
Of a lost, black male child
Who is not caught up in the system?

At 18 I am old enough to go to war
But where I come from it's war everyday
If it ain't the dudes from down the street
It's the ones from around the corner
And if they all miss I got the police trying to plant shhh on
me
The D.A. coming up with all kind of charges
While the Department of Corrections just keep gettin'
larger
Built to keep me locked away so long that my hair will be
grey
Never knowing the true meaning of love
Because my youth was spent hustlin', thuggin', sellin'
drugs
Now here in this cell I sit reaching out to you from
experience
Allowing you to view the world through a life lived
Never give up on yourself,
For life is what you make it
Now that's real!

It's okay, keep it hyphy, sport your Nikes
Wear your white Tees, it won't make you mighty!

DWIGHT ABBOTT ***As we mentioned in an earlier issue, SunMan'sLight (Dwight Abbott) has just had his first book, "I Cried, You Didn't Listen," republished. It describes growing up in the California Youth Authority from age 9, and is one of the most powerful books we've ever read on the subject and, without doubt, the most popular book we've ever given out in our workshops. Now, Dwight would like Beat readers to read the first chapter of his second book for your feedback. Although too long to be published in a single issue (we'll break it into three parts), Dwight wants to know whether you liked what you read, and whether you'd like to read the entire book after reading just one chapter. He has tentatively named this second book, "Consequences," but he wants to know if you have other suggestions for a title. Dwight writes his books and his Beat pieces from his cell at Salinas Valley State Prison.***

Consequences: An Introduction

My back was bowed from the force applied to pull tight and down the chain hanging from the back of my waist-chain to be padlocked together with the leg-irons that bound my ankles. The guard roughly, with finger unnecessarily digging into the muscles of my arms, steadied me as I shuffled from the plane and was lifted into a waiting van.

It seemed a short drive to the Oregon State Penitentiary, but for all I know it could have taken hours as I was lost deep in thought: "Well, here we go again; doesn't look like it is ever going to end. Seems like one of us would have given up by now. How long has it been? I'm thirty, and the system has been trying to break me since I was about, what, twelve?"

From deep within the bowels of the worst our state has to offer those who transgress, there was a whisper from the darkness.

"Why? Why did it have to come to this?"

I raised my head and listened for the answer, but it did not come. "Did I really hear that? If I did, am I in trouble? I'm the only on here."

For many years inside state prison, beginning in 1961, my experience was one I could not complain a whole lot about. After all, I did not know anything else, another way of life —not one I could hold on to anyway.

From the age of nine I have known little other than incarceration. By the time I was twelve, I had been in and out of Juvenile Hall more times than I could count. Blonde, blue-eyed, five feet tall, possibly a hundred pounds, I was sexually molested by counselors, severely beaten by older peers, and put into solitary confinement for taking a baseball bat to another kid who happened to be the boy unfortunate enough to pick on me when I decided I had enough.

During my entire four months inside that solitary cell at Los Angeles Central Juvenile Hall, I swore someday I would be big enough to defend myself, that no one would ever again touch me unless I wanted to be touched.

It was at the Optimist Home for Boys in Highland Park, California, under the keen observation of coach "Jungle Jim," I learned how to fight inside the boxing ring, and it was he who encouraged me to begin a strenuous exercise regimen, and never to quit. By age thirty, at six feet tall, I weighed 214 pounds, measured a fifty-inch chest, and had nineteen-inch arms on the hang, a 32-inch waist, and legs that could easily pump 700 pounds.

In 1964-65, a racist, I had became associated with members of an up-and-coming white supremacy gang. It was a violent era, and whom you associated with was carefully scrutinized and considered by all. There were then, and are today, consequences for making choices and decisions, right and wrong. One of consequence is the high probability, in exchange for your loyalty, you will serve the rest of your life inside a 6x10 foot cage. Another is the likelihood, often mercifully so, your life will be made short. Of the forty-two original members I came to know back then, there are only eight, that I am aware of, who have not died a violent death. The members today who collected their bones after the 1970s I do know.

"Well, here we go again; doesn't look like it is ever going to end. Seems like one of us would have given up by now. How long has it been? I'm thirty, and the system has been trying to break me since I was about, what, twelve?"

Consequences: Chapter 1, Part 1

Early one morning I was awakened, "Abbott! Abbott! Get your ass up. You are out of here."

Groggily, I stood and began to put my pants on. "Don't worry about all that, you won't be wearing them. What's your number convict?"

"A-66078," I responded

"Run your fingers through your hair, open your mouth. Lift your balls. Turn around, bend over. Let me see what you got there."

Naked, I stepped out onto the tier. "Just another day at Disneyland," I thought to myself as I was handed a white coverall and a pair of socks.

After the chains were affixed, I was escorted off the tier amidst shout-outs of "Take it easy, brother," "Stay strong" and "See you down the line."

Once on ground level inside the South Block Rotunda at San Quentin State Prison, I noticed two other chained convicts I was associated with. Silently we greeted one another, eyes questioning.

The guards took to whispering until we were escorted into Oregon State Penitentiary early that afternoon.

"Your new home, Abbott. Let's see you kill someone here."

"No problem," was my thought.

"The other two will not be joining you."

I was taken into what appeared to be a two-story building, through a barrier gate, and down a tier of individual cells in which there were other prisoners standing, looking out at me. Near the back thee was another barrier gate I passed through sliding my feet across the worn concrete floor.

It was the blankets hanging on the outside windows, shutting off the light that first caught my attention. Then, directly across, it was the four or five cells. Each had a solid door upon which was attached a heavy metal flap that was obviously used to cover a small window cut into the door.

"Been there, done that," came to my mind.

With the tip of a club pushed into the small of my back, I was prodded into the very last cell. Its familiar stench caused by long-standing urine and feces was overwhelming. I had been inside a great many solitary confinement cells through the years, and none was nice, but this one was exceptionally bad.

Once I had passed through the entry, I realized inside there were bars the width of the cell, with a sliding gate, set approximately four feet from the solid front.

"Step to the back of the cell and do not turn around." I further noticed what appeared to be a gray blanket lying next to a small, round, dark hole in the center of the floor. There was not a bed, not a toilet, nor was there a sink. I did as instructed and stared at a 16x16 inch barred opening in the back wall that ad its own small, door-like steel flap that, apparently, could be unlocked from the plumbing chase behind the cell. The barred barrier gate slammed shut.

"Step backward until I instruct you to stop. Stop!"

Taking no unnecessary chances, one guard held the back of my waist chain using it to pull me tight against the bars, while another unlocked my leg irons and removed

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DWIGHT ABBOTT (CONT.)

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them. The padlock snug against the small of my back was then removed, and the chain slid from my waist in such a way I was pulled around by the handcuffs on my wrist that were also attached to that chain.

"Stick both hands through the bars." The cuffs were removed.

"Remove the coverall. While here, this is what you will wear." I was handed boxer underwear and waited for my shirt and pants.

"That's all you're getting. You ain't at home, asshole. You are here as our guest. It is most likely you will not like us, nor will you appreciate our fine accommodations. You do not exist, convict. We can do whatever we want and nobody will ever know. If they did, they likely would not care anyway. Your treatment may or may not be dependent upon your behavior. Do we understand one another?"

I stood silent as the door slammed shut and sealed me in darkness. As I listened to the fading jingle f the guards' large brass keys, my eyes attempted to focus in the darkness. It was not going to happen. I could not so much as see my hand when I held it close to my face.

Wearing only my boxers, the cold air blowing from somewhere into the cell began to chill me. I leaned over and felt for the blanket. It was a thick, heavy, grainy, canvas-like material. Its weight I could feel as I threw it over my shoulders to cover myself. Just then the metal flap was yanked open.

"I asked you if we understood one another, convict!" the guard yelled just as a powerful stream of water hit me on my face and chest slamming me back against the concrete wall. "Next time I ask you a frikking question, you best give me an answer!"

With my fingers I flicked water from my eyes. As I choked up water that had been forced into my lungs by the pressure of the water emitting from the fire hose, I was beginning to think might have a bit of a problem.

If I had been chilled earlier, I now felt I had stepped into a freezer. Without thinking, I reached down to take up my blanket and found it soaked. I decided to lay it out as it would cover most of the floor helping me to avoid slipping as I began doing exercises. I did not stop until I heard keys sometime later, possibly a couple of hours. I did not hesitate to step to the bars and squat down to avoid the initial force from the water I expected. My mama would be proud how quickly I learned inside prison, and she no doubt would ask, "Why couldn't you learn when you were on the streets? You wouldn't be in this mess?"

"Chow time, Abbott. Step to the back of the cell."

Anticipating some sort of trick, I held the blanket before me as a narrow slot I had not noticed at the bottom of the door was keyed open and a paper plate along with a cup was pushed through, after which the slot was again locked. Bending down in the pitch-black darkness, I reached through the bars, felt for the plate. I had to bend it in the center to get it through the bars, but the cup was not a problem.

Wet, cold, shivering, I held the food to my face attempting to smell what I was about to eat. That was a mistake. I did end drinking the cup of water about the same time I realized I had not been given a spoon, fork — whatever — to feed myself. At that moment, I had no idea I would be using only my fingers for the next 54 months.

Lifting my blanket to hang it upon the bars, my common sense dictated that I understand it would be a very long time before it dried, if it did, in the conditions that existed. Another problem, now that it was wet, there was the unpleasant odor of old mold emitting from it, and possibly the entire cell. The positive side was the water washed away, however temporarily, the smell of urine and feces.

Using my bare feet, I began pushing water into the hole I had determined from past experience was to be my toilet. After nearly an hour, possibly more, or less, no real way to tell, the floor was clean and nearly dry. What was dripping from the blanket was something I could do little about.

"Step to the back and face the wall, Abbott." I was beginning to suspect that order was going to get old real quick. A nearly silent sound I barely heard, more sensed, the lock being released that would allow the barrier bate to be manually slip open. Immediately following was the main door slamming back. Before I was able to completely turn around, a number of guards had hold of me and together we wrestled to the floor.

As they used their body weight to press my back tightly against the floor, I felt the cold metal of leg irons being placed to restrain my feet as my wrists were pulled across my stomach and handcuffed. During this encounter, through the entire struggle, not a word was uttered by any of us.

Even with the door open, it seemed dark as I was unable to see the faces of the "men" who held me, though I could smell their foul breath. Then I realized they were wearing some sort of head gear that disguised them, intentionally or not I do not know.

I was lifted from the floor and half carried, half dragged, the near length of the cell; I was stood upon my feet, shoulders against the bars, and held firmly. My hands and arms were forcefully stretched toward the ceiling, and I felt what had to be another set of handcuffs being attached to my wrists in such a way my hands would be secured to the cell bars above my head.

"Had to get you tucked in for the night, Dwight. Now don't you go anywhere until I get back tomorrow, okay?" I spit on his face.

By the time they left a few minutes afterward, I knew I was in for a very long and difficult night. The only parts of my body not chilled were my lips, my chin, and areas of my chest, upon and over which warm blood flowed. I figured my nose was broken, and with my tongue, I could feel where once there were teeth. In the darkness, I was able only to "feel" the other injuries that may or may not be bleeding. I had been given a thorough, possibly professional, beating.

I heard them arrive. The window cover behind me dropped. "here we go again," I thought.

"It is going to be a long time before you stop regretting that, you piece of garbage. You'll hang there so long you are going to think you're Jesus H. frikking Christ." All the while that he spoke, surprisingly with a calm voice, I was being viciously prodded with something pushed beyond the window opening and jammed through the bars. "Ever been worked over with an axe handle, boy?"

They knew exactly what they were doing, and how to do it. It was not the first time they had done this to some poor bastard unable to fight back. I struggled, not always successfully, not to make a sound that would serve to satisfy the sadist within them.

After they left, again I considered the many different areas my body hurt. Before that beating, I had no idea it was possible to hit someone so hard over their kidney that involuntary urination would be induced.

Through the night, how I do not know, I would doze. Had it not been for the steel handcuffs around my wrist causing a considerable amount of pain, as they ground against bone and muscle, I may actually have gotten some healing sleep.

Don't misunderstand me. The beatings I took that day hurt. Do not get an image in your mind of some huge, muscled, hard-core killer defying his guards in spite of al that was done to him. In reality, after they left, I wept. I was hurt, alone, confused, as I had no idea why this was happening.

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DWIGHT ABBOTT (CONT.)

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Shaking the tears from my eyes, I forced my thoughts not to dwell upon the moment by doing what I have always done since a child hidden away inside the California youth penal system: I thought of my mother, my father, and little brother Danny. I remembered my mother holding me upon her knee as she sang a song, "The White Cliffs of Dover"; my dad whisking us off to Willow Beach, Arizona, located on the Colorado River, where we would camp out, explore the river on our family boat, and catch fish; Danny and me always playing together, chasing pigs and chickens, collecting acorns, building snow men in the winter time, playing in the trees, and swimming in the creek that flowed through our property in Redding, California.

Often, alone I would speak in thought, at times aloud with my words echoing throughout the bare cell, to my family, as if we were again all together. This night I did a bit of both as I sought forgiveness from them for breaking their hearts.

"Daddy, Mom, if I had not listened to everyone but you, I would not be hanging around here right now... I remember the promises I made to both of you that I would be good, get a job, earn my way. I so very much wanted you to be proud of me. please believe me, I did not lie to you — I really thought I could do it."

It has always amazed me how fresh memories of family remain inside my head, no matter the many years since past. I painfully remember every promise I made to each of them, and how convinced I was that I would not fail the, nor myself. Never, ever, was it a lie! I live my life regretting that I hurt them; that I forced them to stand helplessly by as I repeatedly passed through the revolving door that separates the "good" folk from the "bad," but these same painful thoughts have got me through hell many times — as if Mom and Dad are still watching over me.

I got through that night and half the next day before I again heard keys.

"Hey, Abbott! You awake in there? How about some breakfast?" A moment of silence before he exclaimed, "Man you are one stubborn SOB!"

"Stubborn" had nothing to do with it. I had no idea what he was looking for from me at this point, nor hat he expected me to say, if anything. I was not — though there are those who would differ with me — a glutton for punishment.

The flap was opened, and I felt something lukewarm splash onto my back and shoulders. "That's your oatmeal and coffee, you frikking idiot! You need to learn how to talk or we are going to have a problem."

"What?" I asked myself. "What the hell has been going on since yesterday... it was yesterday, wasn't it? We are 'going to have a problem'? How much worse could it get?" Wrong question.

I estimated an hour and they were back. My gut knotted as I listened to the door quietly open.

"What we have here is a failure to communicate. Ever see 'Cool Hand Luke,' Abbott? No dirt around here, though, and it is your constitutional right not to be put in one of those boxes. As you must have noticed already, around here we respect your constitutional rights...

"Gonna take you down from there now. go right ahead if you want to do something stupid, in which case we'll have ourselves another go... I went home last night, had a couple shots of real good whiskey, screwed my woman, and then got to thinking about you. Now, I'm just thinking that maybe you ain't as bas as they told us. It might just be you're just misunderstood. Hell, all this time you may have always been looking for the chance to do the right thing. What do you say, convict? Am I on the right track?"

The cuffs were removed from around my wrist, and my hands began to awaken from their sleep. I turned and stared through the bars at him, aware of the leg irons restricting my feet. He stepped back.

Before that exact moment, my only intention had been to remain passive as they talked out the side of their necks, and in this way get myself a shower. That all changed when he stepped back like the coward I suspected all along he was. My resolve was ripped from me.

"Let me see if I got this right, bull. You screwed your old lady and then got to thinking about me? You queer?"

"You motha! Turn around and back up to the bars, asshole!"

"Sorry. Not this time."

"Cuff it up or yesterday will seem like we was just playing."

"Now that you got you backup here with all that noise... I didn't think you would be stepping off into this cell all by yourself any time soon."

"Rack the frikking gate! Rack it, now! Step back, you son-of-a-bitch!"

"That's not nice. I don't recall outing your mother."

"Screw the damn shield! Open the goddamn gate, now!"

The guy was so beside himself I could just about feel sorry for him. Four guards tried to come through a three-foot wide entrance at the same time, giving me the one and only shot I knew I was going to get with leg restraints on. I hit him so hard I'm near certain the sound of bones shattering in his jaw could be heard out in the front section. The others began tripping over him to reach me as several additional guards ran up and in.

Can't honestly say I remember much of what happened next. I did hear a considerable amount of yelling that I assumed were other prisoners, and I do recall briefly seeing what appeared to be a pick-axe handle, likely the one earlier mentioned, just before I was hit hard from behind and mercifully lost consciousness.

I awakened to complete silence. It seemed darker than it had been if that was possible. I turned my head and realized I had some sort of hood covering my face. I was on my stomach, wrists secured tightly together by something behind my back. It took but a few seconds before I realized I was hog-tied. My feet were bound together and pulled up until the heels of each foot rested upon my butt, and my wrists secured to my ankles.

Before this incident, I had been aware there were cockroaches that would come from the hole in the floor and attempt to carry me off. Now, as I lay there, for the first time I began to realize also sharing my cell were rats. I listened as they communicated with one another, and I felt them scurry over and around me in their journey to satisfy their insistent curiosity.

"Who is this stranger in my house?" I imagined them asking one another.

I quickly discovered I enjoyed the company they seemed to be offering me. I began to give them names, convinced each had its own distinguishing personality. As my hood was nuzzled against, I would speak out.

"How is your day going?" It would again nudge my hood as if it understood. They were good company, distracting. They kept my mind from losing itself in the abyss that threatens to swallow up all who dare to enter solitary confinement.

How Many More

How many more innocent victims do we need to make cry
How many times through a bullet-proof glass can a mom tell her baby good-bye
When is enough, enough? When will I learn
When can those close to me stay, without getting burned
Too many questions left unanswered, with no clue
How many doors can I stop myself from stepping through
How many times can I wonder when's the next time we'll touch
Why do these non-contact visits seem to hurt me so much
How many more lonely nights can I take
How long before those who love me realize they've made a mistake
How many lights at the end of the tunnel can I pass by
Only to see miles of darkness, with no stars in the sky
How many judges can I tell I'm sorry, it will never happen again
How much longer can I count on a picture being my closest friend
How many more prisons can they possibly build
How many more like me can keep coming back and keep them filled
How many birthdays can kids spend without their Dad
How much longer can we brag about worthless fun that we've had
How many collect calls can a family accept
How many sins under the carpet can be swept
Do my apologies even carry any more weight
How many turns until I can make my crooked life straight
Is there anyone else who is sick of this life of sin
What I wouldn't give to go back and find a different door to step in
How many more out there are ready to change who we are
How many more questions before we learn the answer isn't far
It lies in our heart, right in the middle of our chest
If we can soften and change that, then it's easy to change the rest
But it doesn't come easy, it's not some kind of magic
It takes a lot of hard work before our life becomes tragic
How many more chances at help will we refuse to grasp
The worst question is the one we refuse to ask
Help is out there, it's time to fight back
Hell, we would have done anything to get a fatter sack
Take half that energy to do the right thing
I'll bet that square life isn't as bad as it seems
Home with our family outside of these walls
Let someone else get stuck with these collect calls
Hug your girl, look in your baby's eyes
Lay down the dope, money and guns
End your mama's cries
How many lives can be lost in the pen
How long will it last, only you can say when

Through the endless trials
And persistent dark of night
The only strength that endures
Is leaning on the Savior's might

ADAM AZEVEDO ***This next writer is continuing to fight his case in Sonoma County. He's trying to have "strikes struck", as happened in San Mateo County and Santa Clara County. Although those 2 counties dropped the strikes, he still was given 16 years for his new case. He's hoping for the same ruling in Sonoma — drop the strikes, and sentence him for the same amount of time he got in the other two counties. He continues to work on establishing his "Behind the Walls" ministry, and teaches Bible Studies in the Sonoma County Jail. Hopefully, he can continue to keep his head up, stay strong, and hit us with some more incredible writings.***

In All Times

Through the endless trials
And persistent dark of night
The only strength that endures
Is leaning on the Savior's might
He said His yoke is easy
For all who are burdened down
He lifted all our sorrows
Above his thorny crown
God delivers through the storm
He guides us through wind and rains
After serving God through trials
Our faith will never be the same
To serve Him when it's peaceful
Can be done by any heart
But in the midst of pain and trouble
Is where real faith gets its start
So lift your eyes to Jesus
See him through the darkest cloud
Serving Him in the darkness
Can only make your Lord so proud

How many judges can I tell I'm sorry,
it will never happen again
How much longer can I count on a picture being my closest friend
How many more prisons can they possibly build
How many more like me can keep coming back
and keep them filled

Time

Time moves forward
Never to return
Teaches many lessons
Never easy to learn
The hands move slow
In the hardest times
Too quick during peace
And when the sun shines
As time passes
So do my dreams
Memories stand still
Motionless like stagnant streams
Where did yesterday go
Let alone last week
Time is teaching me
To listen more than I speak
It's hard enough dealing with today
Not worrying about tomorrow
Or stressing over yesterday
Stuck in regretful sorrow
For now I'll let it pass
While I do what I can
Only hoping that time
Will make me a better man

ROYALE LEBLANC ***After a long silence, our former colleague at The Beat and longtime writer from SF/YGC, Lil' Crazy (now calling himself Crazy T) has reconnected. This fine writer, Royale LeBlanc, has had to grow up as many of you have, and as no child should be made to in what we like to believe is the richest country in the world. His problems with family and gangs and the streets are all made much more understandable when you read his starkly real autobiographical poem, "Life Wit' Shady Tactics". But he keeps struggling, and we admire him for that. The heart-breaking piece, "A Lost Child" reminds us of the reality of children having children — and the permanent pain of loss. The thanks he gives The Beat are, of course, appreciated, but there is no Beat without writers like him to make it happen. Royale writes to us from the California Youth Authority.***

Dear Beat

First and foremost I will like to hope an' pray that this letter finds you in the best of health and finds you emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually stable. As for me I'm doing cool and just surviving through this hard time. I'm keeping my head he ld high and striving for betterment within myself. I've found myself in this situation that only a true soldier can fight. And find his way back to his port.

I also find myself helping a lot of individuals through their continuing war day by day. It's sort of a good logical way for me to build my social skills, and also teach and lead others into success. I've accomplished things in the "Y" that I thought might and will help me when I return home. It's been a journey for me. I was in county jail for damn near a year tryin' to fight this incarceration time. As you can obviously see, I lost. Like I always do when I partake to fight the government. I'll hopefully return home soon.

I've lost a lot since being in jail. This time I've lost three close homeboys, my lil' cousin got shot up, and the biggest one of them all... I lost my daughter. I know it seems like a lot, which it is. I've been dealing with it as a man should. It has been very tough, but I continue to stay strong and push myself. It's days that I sit back and think to myself if I was at home will anything be different? I try not to think like that 'cause I cannot live my life wondering about the ifs, ands or buts.

I do want to thank The Beat Within for being here for a person letting them express themselves. I came up here and talked to a lot of the kids about the Beat Within, so if any new people write I'm glad. I also wrote a letter to the lead of case manager about the programs. So we got his approval also.

Well I'm going to end this by telling you it's filled with nothing but love, loyalty, and respect. I excuse myself in full.

Life Wit' Shady Tactics

I can remember when I was two
My father got killed in front of my eyes
I didn't know what to do
It caught me by surprise
Brains, guts, and lots of blood
Is what filled my face
To the police it was just another case
Of a drug deal gone bad
It left my famila oh so sad

I'm lost in the streets 'cause my mother left me
Abandoned with nowhere to go
I'm three eating out the trash
My brothers five years older
Lent me his shoulder
He tried to do for us both
But was too young to do so
Ages three and eight
Livin' nowhere we can have a hot plate

I'm 11 my brother's 16
Into gangs of these streets, I call it livin'
My bro' went away for a very long time
Now I'm left to make a life I'll call mine
11 years old sittin' in YGC
Thinkin' to myself "Man, shhh, this can't be me!"
Locked up on one murder and three attempted murders
The cops proposin' shhh that I ain't never hearda
A year and a half later I'm just getting out
I try to find my momma but she's all strung out

These are the steps an' strides that I went through
At times left alone and didn't know what to do
Now I'm older and I'm tryin to make it
This vicious cycle of comin to jail, I'm tryin' to break it
Only time can tell of the next situation
At this point in my life it's only time that I'm facin'!

I've lost a lot since being in jail. This time I've lost three close homeboys, my lil' cousin got shot up, and the biggest one of them all . . . I lost my daughter.

A Lost Child

As I sit back and think about all the times that I was with this sweet, beautiful, charming, loveable, smart and joyful person, it brings tears to my eyes. To know that I'll never touch, kiss, hold, talk too, nor play with this individual brings tears to my eyes. This person meant a lot to me. More then you'll ever think. I cannot bear the pain of knowin' that I'll never see her again.

I can remember way back when I was barely into my teens when I first met you. It was September 9th, 1999. This is when I laid my eyes on this beautiful person.

I remember when we used to stay up late and just stare into each other's eyes 'cause you couldn't go to sleep. When I used to hold your hand everywhere we went. I always picked you up when you were tired. Put you on my back and we were off. I can remember when your mom didn't want you to see me anymore for various different reasons — a couple being that I was still in the streets, I was always coming home late. Also, you always wanted to be with me and not her. It made her feel like you didn't care. But we were both still kids so how were you supposed to know?

The fist birthday party that you really had was crazy. You were running around telling everybody it was your birthday and that they had to get out if they didn't have a present for you. It was one of the funniest things I've ever seen in my life. But you were having fun and that's all that mattered to me. As long as you had a smile upon your face I was happy. Then a couple of years later you were in the hospital 'cause of your asthma. You scared a lot of people. Then I know I left you for the longest time. I got locked you for 3 1/2 years.

It was very hard for me to do almost anything 'cause my mind was always on you. I couldn't do my music, sports, or poems 'cause I was focused on you and your brother. I finally came home September 13 of 2005. We were re-united. But then in November you were taken away from me 'cause your mother didn't want you to be around me. The main issue was I didn't want to involve myself with your mom so she used you to get back at me. She took you out of the country. I was very hurt and I felt that I would never see you again.

My freedom not far after was also taken away from me. On January 2, 2006 someone attempted to kill me but shot the wrong person. I've been back in this hell hole for almost another year. I was only out for three months.

It feels like I've been locked up for a long, long time. I had three months of what the government calls freedom. No, it wasn't freedom, it was a setup for failure. And I failed. But in July on the 13th 2006 I got the worst news of my life. I was told you were taken away from me due to your asthma condition.

First off, I was never even aware that you were even back in the States, but the first thing I learned here is that you was in a coma. It hit me hard for the simple fact that I didn't even know you were back home. It struck me 'cause you

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ROYALE LEBLANC (CONT.)

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could've came to see me or I could've at least talked to you. This really hurt my feelings to the max. I can't believe your mother would've stooped that low just to get at me. It wasn't fair to you nor anyone else that loved you.

I have not much family outside of these walls so you were then taken back to Dominican Republic (your mother's country) to be buried. When I found out the you were taken away, I told your uncle "Capone" that you passed away. He was crying along with me, but he didn't get the chance to meet his niece, and you didn't get to meet your uncle, or should I say uncles and aunts. It hurts me more to know that you never got to meet the rest of your family. It affected a lot of people. Your mother was all messed up in the head also. I'm seeing it as you're in a better place and not suffering. I really cannot believe that you're gone, but I've got to step back into reality.

I don't think that I can bear anything that will remind me that you're gone. It hurts enough just to think about you being gone. I know that you were loved by everyone who knew you and also by lots who don't know you. Now I sit back, locked up once again, and thinking about all the good times that we've had together. You were taken at a very young age. You would've been seven years old this year in September. Like I said before we are both young and had a longer life to live. I'm about to be 20 years old in September, and one of my children are gone. You missed your brothers 3rd birthday, and he's going to miss his big sister.

Me as your father, I'm going through a lot and trying my best to become a better man within myself. As a young parent I will like to tell all of the other young parents to spend the most time you can with your kids 'cause you never know when they'll be taken from you. It could be one day they're there and the next they're not. Be thankful for the time you do get to be with them. I never got the chance to say good-bye to my daughter for the simple fact that I was in a situation that prevented me to do so.

The moral of me telling this story and sharing this painful memory is to let the young parents as myself know that time is a precious thing and there's a lot you can accomplish within it. Be a parent at every givin' time because you never know when it'll be snatched away from you. I hope that I could get to at least one person by letting them know that being locked up doesn't help any situation.

With love and rage, Crazy T.
Rest In Peace, Precious
Sunrise: 9/9/99 — Sunset: 7/13/06

MIKHAIL MARKHASEV

One of our greatest thinkers and most prolific poets is about to get the stage, so please stay in your seats and listen to the intelligent words of Mikhail Markhasev. This week he speaks about his take on 'winners and losers' and what those terms mean to him. And as he does so, you can't help but find your self agreeing with him. Or at least that's the effect it had on us. So often do we just chalk definitions up as being true that we forget to think outside the box and come up with our own conclusions. Well, Mikhail has broken the cycle and has given everyone something to think about. Let's see if it sits well with you. He's writing from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA.

Winners And Losers

I remember reading about Thomas Edison, how the great inventor, prior to making the light bulb that worked, has failed close to two thousand times. When asked about it, he replied that he hadn't failed, but only discovered two thousand ways in which a light bulb wouldn't work. Someone says that winning isn't everything, but the only thing. Yet how do we define that "one thing" if it is as simple as being the opposite of losing? A defeat for one is a step towards victory for another. Again, who is in a position to determine winners and losers? Does success determine a winner or failure a loser? Certainly, we all have a criterion by which we measure these matters, but it's clear that there's more to it than our perception of things.

In general terms, winning means gaining something and a winner is seen as victorious, captivating. A loser, on the other hand, is usually marked by failures and defeats. Interestingly enough, in my Webster's New Explorer Dictionary & Thesaurus, a convict is a synonym for loser. The definition is given by a society where money is God, power is an idol, and honor is given to those who ascend the ladder of success by stepping on those beneath him. The dictionary doesn't explain if a convict is still a loser if he is wrongly convicted or if he was convicted for saying the right thing (as was the case with many losers who later were magically turned into winners by the rise of history and a change of opinion). At the same token, is one still a winner if the success comes at the price of one's dignity or is attained by shameful means?

Life is a journey and only when it is complete and the final destination is reached can the title be determined. A winner today can easily become a loser tomorrow and it is not about whom we are, but who we're seeking to become. Each day we choose our own path and true achievement isn't what we possess but what we've overcome to obtain it. It's important to be on the right track-even if it means being on the losing side. Many persons have a wrong idea about what constitutes true happiness," said Helen Keller, "it is not attained though self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose." It's not about finishing first, but making it to the finish line in spite of the obstacles and personal stumbling.

"Without struggle there is no progress," said Frederick Douglass. The Greatest struggle is the one we face within ourselves and against ourselves. The greatest victory is over oneself for the sake of others. A winner is not someone who doesn't know failure but one who overcomes his failures. And a loser isn't the one who fails while trying but who fails to try at all.

I believe that we all lose when we fail to use what we have, or take for granted whatever opportunities we are given. I believe that we win when refusing to compromise in principle, when we take a stand in something good-even if it means suffering a loss in privilege or benefits. I've been a loser on many occasions, often many times a day, but that's not who I want to be. Every day each of us inches closer and closer to becoming a winner or a loser at the end of our journey. Ultimately, the difference isn't measured by success or failure, but in refusing to accept failure as the final outcome.

EL BALA ***Writing from Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA, we give to you a very thoughtful and wise writer. This week he gives us a very good letter and some even more incredible poems. It takes an act of courage to give lessons through our own mistakes, but we all know that's the best way to learn. When people like El Bala speak, we listen. He demands attention with his positive beliefs and skilled way of expressing them. Thank you and keep teaching us because we really need to learn.***

The Beat Within

What's up my gente, just dropping by to express my regards to all the youngsters, going through hard times in lock down. Also I been reading their poems, thoughts, I'm sad to see how they glorify the gangster life or saying how they miss the hood, the homies, instead of the family. I been locked up for thirteen years and I'm currently in the SHU segregation housing unit for being a knuckle head. I'll be here for many years. Its not easy being in prison, you must act to stay alive, or live being pushed around. I do not wish for any of the youth to end up here. I lost my dad, two grandpas behind bars. I couldn't even pay respects at the funerals.

This is not the life, the rappers portray on the TV, CD's, I hope you get to experience life behind bars through my poetry, I got mad love for you and stay positive.

Tears Of A Clown

Flying high, floating through the sky
A tear in the corner of my eye
In the form of ink
Of too much pride is of what I speak
Tears of ink to give the best
To those you lost you pay respect
Who was your friend
Who was your brother
Who was your father
From start to end
Deadly time just staying still
Blowing cold air, skin feeling the chills
For all the cries, the sins, the eyes have seen
To stay away, to stay awake
A bad disguise impossible to break
A picture in the mind of the forgotten times
Putting the hurt and sadness on rimes
Tears of a clown
Marked in the corner of the eye
You cannot cry
You cannot cry
The tear that never leaves the eye
Tears of a clown without a smile, just a frown
Trying not to go too fast, but to slow down
You cannot cry
You cannot cry
The tear that never leaves the eye...

From start to end
Deadly time just staying still
Blowing cold air, skin feeling the chills
For all the cries, the sins, the eyes have seen
To stay away, to stay awake
A bad disguise impossible to break

Walking The Strife

Walking with death hand in hand,
Is like being stuck in quicksand,
And not knowing how to express your emotions
Can be a difficult thing to do,
So I'll lay this out for you as proof,
I been doing it wrong for so many years,
And in the process, bottled up all my fears,
Receiving the deep cuts in life, with the sharpest knives,
And those wounds are yet to heal, you tend to them to go on with life, But looking for something, you start walking (the strife)
Putting more poison in your heart that hardens your spirit
And turns it to rock
Going all out, not knowing how to stop,
Looking for the passion of the moment,
Receiving a little love here and there, in the arms of the willing woman, But the deep wounds in your heart keep coming back,
You fight it, pushing through the rubble,
But you only keep falling deeper and deeper into trouble,
What a cruel gesture from above
Living without (love)
It's another lesson in life, as you keep walkin' the strife
But nothing comes without expense.
None of this was wish into existence,
And if you try to the right thing, you only find resistance,
Peace and love, what a difficult thing,
Learning to wear it around heart like a ring,
The pure essentials of life, like breathing fresh air,
But it doesn't mix with the walk of the strife to many deep cuts in the body.
Wounds can leave scars of a lifetime, how to feel??
How to know when it's time to heal??
It's not easy to just let it be,
You may at times feel pure and free,
But your heart will always be under lock and key,
Matters of the heart can be so complex,
Not knowing what could come next,
No love, just pain,
Nothing to offer, nothing to gain,
What is the problem?
What is the solution to my revolution!?
Only the industry in my heart of hate,
Pushing down the problems with the drugs that we take,
Sadness, sorrow, in the alley so dark, so narrow,
So damp around the coldest, the heatless,
Living through the rough paths in life,
As we keep walking (the strife)
With even more cuts that wont heal, slowly bleeding,
Starting to feel so ill, only being jaded, with outcome procrastinated, being so far away .not knowing how to return,
Without the love that you think you earned,
Calling to your soul, wishing not feel so cold,
And for this sad story to never be told,
Falling deeper into the abyss,
Having nothing to hope for, regretting all this,
Slammed down but not yet broken,
(Love) powerful words unspoken,
Standing tall, staying strong, to never fall,
Waiting for the wound to heal
And your heart is pumping nothing but fear,
Always listening to those powerful words in your ear,
(Hate) what a torture abuse,
Going though life feeling misused,
But from me will never hear a cry,
You will never see any weakness in my eyes,
But now I'm on the outside looking in,
Leaking my heart and soul through a pen,
As it's been raining on me and I'm yelling at (God)
To turn me into that something I'm not,
Trapped in this box 8 feet wide,
As I keep on walking and walking the strife...

Heaven Sent But Not Hell Bound

What has gone before, left behind untold,
Harvest of the soul, end of time, end of my peace of mind
A long wait can make you appreciate what's at stake,
Hoping for the next day to awake.
Heaven sent, but not hell bound,
As we experience the violence all around,
I am what I am, so judge me as you please!!
But it won't change anything, unless you become a part of me,
Darker days still lie ahead, and all the hate has clouded my brain,
Friend and foes, who to trust,
Everyone in here is on his own, no sunshine, sooner or later I will rust
My soul will pill away the crust; this life is not to be sold
But to you it must be told, I wish I could have it in the past,
Slow down stop moving too fast

EL BALA (CONT.)

As I roam around in dangerous territories,
Proving to all I deserve all the glory,
But I need to find out who I really am,
But I'm yet to understand,
The path to lead me to be a greater man and yet,
I do not know how to begin
I need a friend and not a foe, this game is getting too old
With the fury of the killer's smile,
Deadly intentions only last for awhile,
Behind bars without a smile,
Everything is done, everything is gone,
I should of never put the clip on the gun,
I wasted my life completely, as it is so believe me when I say this,
I just got to slow down ...

I believe that my life is an open-book, in reality I have a criminal record that is public information but I 'm also going deep within myself, into the closets that I find within myself and exposing skeletons and secrets of things I've done using hit man/image behavior.

RICKY QUARLES

What a week for The Beat Without section! Hopefully we can get more of our youth to read this section because a lot of people are concerned that they don't even know about. Some are redeeming themselves through the pen while others are working in the community, giving back with direct retribution. This next writer's doing both. And he seems to be really good at it. Working at an outreach program in Bay View/Hunter's Point, this man was on a mission to do something productive and that's give youth other outlets to let their aggression out besides the ones that harm them. A true beacon of change is one who will go to any length to see that change happen. He's currently writing from California State Prison in Vacaville, CA. We're grateful to have someone as courageous and intelligent as you on our side.

Dear Editors Of The Beat Within,

My name is Ricky Quarles, I'm currently an inmate at the California

Medical Facility State Prison, in Vacaville, C.A. I'm serving a 10 yr. sentence for two counts of bank robbery (2nd degree), these crimes took place in San Francisco in Sept/Oct of 2002.

Even though I've been in and out of trouble most of my adult life, I've discovered the cause of why I grew up misusing my power/ability, why I've made my decisions that has negative consequences that causes oppression to myself and my family (No Children), my victims, and my community.

The problem is my male role belief system or Mr. Bull-Shhh (M.R.B.S) this system has taught me and conditioned me to have a hit man/image that uses the power I give it, to be violent to my authentic self, and others. My aggressive attitude is controlling, and my behavior is coercing, unconsciously, and consciously I control by measuring myself against the role of superior, and inferior, as well as others, especially women.

I was taught that I had a God-given right to be superior over women as a man; I was also taught that boys don't cry, that if somebody hits you, hit them back, that boys don't play with dolls, boys don't wear pink, that men are the kings of their castles, that women should do things for their men, including have the right attitude and don't embarrass me in public or in front of my boys.

I felt that I was entitled to sex when in a relationship and my image/hit man which is fake would enforce my expectations of authority, and my expectation of services, but in so doing I was hurting myself. So while I was taking what I wanted, and controlling my true self and others, I was also coercing others into expected roles, and developing my hit man who I have discovered to be in name and actions as "Manipulating-Possessive-Territorial-Bully," at one time in my life this hit man/image protected me, when I was young I was abused, emotionally, verbally and physically also sexually but learning to depend on a hit man/image which is fake is a trick, I feel now that I was hoodwinked and bamboozled. I inherited a lot of bad habits, not to mention being from the cruel streets and learning to operate under the code of the streets.

One of the codes is show no emotions, no positive ones any way, which oppresses one's humanity, the opposite of human is a monster, if there is no empathy then one's or my idea of survival was about me, and me, survive by any means necessary, regardless of the consequences.

I've learned a lot about myself and I'm examining my M.R.B.S, I'm also embracing my authentic self whom I discovered to be caring-loving-compassionate-black man and I'm using my heart and my emotions to express myself in a assertive fashion, I'm also practicing acceptance and equality. I have empathy and I'm committed to using my power/ability to create instead of destroying myself and others. I want to help community by sharing my knowledge and experience with young people especially young men who are headed in the same direction, where I am in prison and out of the loop of society.

I'm sending you a story I wrote while I was in the resolve to stop the violence program in county jail #7, I wrote this story why I care for the issue, a magazine that highlights restorative justice, and the work that I an other men while incarcerated, dealing with pending cases have discovered about themselves, I'm helping myself, by awareness + action = Change (A+A=C), and helping others to realize how the misuse or mismanagement of one's power has severe consequences that most of us don't want, but in order to change the outcome, you must change your attitude and behavior like I'm doing now, this work can be hard in prison, but my choices are few, I must take the advantage of my current situation in order to get on the path of success to become a community activist and one day to be the executive director of my own community agency for at-risk youth.

I believe that my life is an open-book, in reality I have a criminal record that is public information but I 'm also going deep within myself, into the closets that I find within myself and exposing skeletons and secrets of things I've done using hit man/image behavior.

If I can't talk and be accountable for myself — hit man or authentic self — then I shouldn't have done whatever I've done.

Please feel free to give or send me feedback or info on how I can help my community.

RICKY QUARLES (CONT.)

Why I Care

Doing outreach work in the Bay View-Hunters Point area of San Francisco can be fun, also dangerous, as the district has seen countless shootings of youth. I was working as the outreach coordinator for a youth development agency for at-risk teenagers. It was my job to leave the safety of the agency's office and build referral services for other at-risks teenagers agencies and community businesses. The area that was targeted was the Bay View Plaza at Third Street and Evans Street, all the way up to Third and Williams Street. The central area three days out of the week for me and my crew was Third and Pavlov is a well-traveled area, what some refer to as a "hot spot", where a lot of African American kids and teens hang out or wait on buses. Over the years, there have been many deaths of youth in this Bay View Hunters Point area, and it seems to get worse with time: black youth killing black youth. So, in my role as an outreach worker, this block, Third and Pavlov provided an excellent place to interact with at-risk teens.

It's Fall, 2002, and I'm doing post-ups at least three days a week, Monday through Thursday, accompanied by three other outreach workers. We watch each others' backs: It is well known that it can be nice, warm, and sunny on the block, youth laughing, talking, interacting, and then without warning gunshots can ring out, and a murder is what's left. My co-workers and I post-up at Third and Pavlov, passing out information on medical, dental, housing, school and job training assistance-and other information relevant to the inner-city youth in Bay View Hunters Point district. It is one of these days, in September that I come into contact with a young woman. The weather is nice, very warm, and I have on a "Think Peace" t-shirt that the agency provides for its outreach workers to wear while out in the community, to push the message, "peace." I love it when I can dress down, when I don't have to wear a jacket in the city; my mood this day is a reflection of the weather.

There is a lot of activity all around me. I can hear people talking and traffic moving-cars, trucks, and horns. I am engaged, interacting with a number of youth, giving out information and answering questions. During this period, I notice a young girl who I can tell wants to speak with me. I have enough experience to understand that she wants to speak with me alone. She's made eye contact with me, and is waiting patiently, within earshot of the other conversations. Eventually, the youth I am interacting with begin to disperse, one by one. Now alone, I turn to the girl.

"How can I help you?" I ask. The girl pauses for a while. It must be two or three minutes before she says anything, but all the time she's not speaking she's looking at me in the eyes. Now, I have met all types of people in my lifetime, with stories to tell, so when I recognize that someone is attempting to tell my something of importance, I wait for them to begin. I stand on the corner with this girl, waiting. My attitude is helpful. When she first begins to speak, her voice is shaky.

"I've seen you on the block a lot of times, and I know you are about helping people. Some of my friends have told me that you've helped them," she says. She is about five feet, six inches tall, with shoulder-length hair in braids. She has a coffee cream complexion and a sad look on her face. She doesn't say her name, and I don't ask. She is about sixteen or seventeen years of age. "I want to tell you what happened to me," she says. I don't know why I've chosen you to talk to, but I made up my mind days ago that I was going to tell you." To me, this is an emergency-type talk, where you just listen. I don't anticipate what her story will be, so I just ready myself to listen to her.

The girl begins by telling me about her friend, with whom she does everything-goes to school together, hangs out together- and how boy always attempt to talk to both of them. They both have boyfriends, but never date the same boys. A few days before, she was at her girlfriend's house, which is normal. They are like sisters, and are always over at each other's houses. That morning, her friend had gone to the store, leaving her in the house by herself. She says, "Shortly after my sister let, there was a knock on the door. I though it was my sister, so I opened the door without really checking to see who it was. It was her boyfriend. I let him in because I knew he was my sister's boyfriend then walked up in me, saying he was looking for his girl. He was up on me so close I couldn't move anywhere but backwards, so I moved back and he moved back with me.

I'm listening attentively. I haven't said a word, I'm just acknowledging everything she's saying by shaking my head, and saying by shaking my head, and saying "Uh huh."

She continues, "I had no place else to move. I was cornered. He started pressing his body upon me. I was trying to create some space between us but he wouldn't allow it. he kept saying, "I'm looking for my girl" He began to feel on me, he was acting like he wasn't hearing me. I was asking him to stop, telling him his girl would be back in a minute from the store."

Some feelings are beginning to come up for me, as this girl gets further along in her story, because I can see where the story is going. I knew she is going to tell me she got raped. I'm embracing myself for it, but I'm getting angry. I can see helplessness and despair on her face, and I can't hear it, and it adds up to pain. Pain is coming from what I'm hearing, from what this girl is telling me. But there's something else I feel too. I can't identify it.

She continues, telling me, "I really tried to resist, freeing myself. While he was going crazy, the only thing I could think about was how was I going to tell my girlfriend?" She told me everything happened real fast and that before I could process anything, the boy pulled her down on the couch, and raped her.

I've never had anyone share a story of this nature with me, I'm outraged by her disclosure of what happened to her-she's so young that she's sharing with me could have come out of the mouth of my own daughter. I look up to the sky, and when I look back at her, in her eyes I see the truth. I see the truth not only about how she was victimized, but how I had victimized as well. I see everything that she has told me. I see the boy forcing himself on her, I see her struggling no avail, and I see the boy raping her. I see it through her eyes, and I also see it through my own eyes.

I flash back to twenty years ago, and it's me committing this rape. It's January 7th, 1982. I'm in college, a football player, a member of a fraternity, popular on campus, and a ladies man. I've gone out clubbing with my boys, my fraternity brothers. It's a habit of ours, not only to have fun, but also to pick up girls. I've had fun, but I haven't picked up a girl. I want to be with a girl, I want some sex. I've been drinking. I've had enough drinks to support the thoughts I'm entertaining. When it's time to leave the club and go back to the fraternity house, I make another plan for myself. I have my boys drop me off at the apartment complex of a girlfriend of mine. I am not invited over, I have not called to announce my arrival, I just showed up. I have a fifth of converser in my hand that I continue to sip. I'm full of myself, confident. I'm on a quest, and I will carry out my plan.

I knock on the door. It opens, but it's not my girlfriend, it's her roommate.

"What's up?" she greets me.

"I came to see my girl," I say.

"Your girl is not here. She went out with her boyfriend." This makes me angry. I frown. "You knew she had a boyfriend, so don't be mad," her roommate tells me. I take the top off my alcohol and swig it. I'm standing in the door and I ask her is she wants some. She refuses. This offends me.

Punk b***h, I say to myself. She thinks she's better than me, too good for me. I step towards her, towards the open door. Forcing myself in. I say angrily, "You ain't gonna invite me in? It's cold here and I got dropped off, so I need a to make a phone call to get a ride." As I say this, barging in to her apartment, I'm thinking, if no one else is here, she's home alone, we can have sex. I'm telling myself that she wants me. "I want to have sex with you," I tell her. She looks at me for a moment.

"Yeah, that could happen, but not here and not now." This is not what I want to hear. I am not going to be denied.

It's 2002 and I'm back on Third Street with the girl. I can't believe what listening to her has brought up for me. I can't believe how it's making me see myself. Even though

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I was arrested after that night and convicted in a jury trial for rape, I only saw what I wanted to see; I told myself for twenty years that it was a set-up, racism at its best. I was black, she was white, it was my word against hers. Because she was white, in front of a white jury, the white system, I was convicted, sentenced to six years in prison.

Now, though, listening to this teenage girl's story, I'm seeing something different. I can't explain why, after all this time; I'm right now seeing the truth about my sexual violence. How, just like the boy who raped this girl in front of me, I raped that girl in rough and controlling, and I'm not going to be denied. I force myself on her.

A thought goes through my mind: My friend's roommate was probably thinking, what am I going to tell my roommate? Just like this teenage girl on the corner of Third and Pavlov was thinking twenty years later. I raped my victim, just like this other boy raped this girl before me. There's no difference between us. I, too, am guilty of rape.

The girl is here, and her story is making me accountable, and it's ugly. I'm hurt by what I'm seeing of myself, because I'm hurt by what this girl is telling me. I'm devastated. Guilt, overdue guilt, and shame, are beginning to overwhelm me. I've been lying to myself and others all this time, just like I know, without doubt, this boy is going to lie about the rape he committed. Just like me.

It will forever haunt me that I didn't help this girl on Third and Pavlov Street that day. If I had been truthful with myself about what I had really done twenty years ago, I could have done restoration work and allowed the empathy that I have today to have helped this teenage girl who, for whatever reason, chose me to disclose how she was a victim of sexual violence. I could have given her my support,, and suggested that she go to the police and report the rape. Instead, I left the girl standing on Third and Pavlov. I literally spun on her, because what had ignited in me was more than I could bear. I tucked my tail between my legs and ran off like a cowardly dog, and I kept running.

I ran from this girl on Third Street. I ran from my job as an outreach coordinator. I ran from the responsibilities that went with that position. I ran from myself, my dignity, and integrity. I ran from my commitments and my sobriety. I ran, as self-pity ate me like a cancer.

That same night, I would make decision to relapse back into my addiction, and eventually back into jail, doing time

RICKY QUARLES (CONT.)

for the crimes I committed and held to answer today.

Today, I'm committed to telling and sharing my experience with rape with anyone who will listen-and especially with men. I know that not only do men need to be educated about how easy it is to rape, but also how can be in denial about one's violence for many years. I've done a lot of work through RSVP, including creating rape prevention program. I've regained my self esteem and self worth, and I'm restoring myself.

Also through RSVP, I now have empathy. I truly feel for other people. I feel the pain of victims and survivors of rape, as well as survivors of violence in general. I have a through knowledge of the impact of violence, as well as the resources that can be taken or added as a result of violence. I've become an advocate for non-violence, stopping my violence, and advocating equality between all people, especially between men and women. We men need to understand that no means nom and young men and boys need to be taught this early in life. Females are no property or second class citizens or sexual objects.

I will never forget the experience I had with the girl on Third and Pavlov and even though I neglected to help her, I feel bad about it, and will for some time to come. Through her, I discovered the truth about my violence and myself and that's "Why I Care."

I'm excited to have been given the opportunity to facilitate a nine (9) hour presentation concerning "MANALIVE" (Men-Allied-Nationally-Against-Living-In-Violent-Environments).

I would like to be given one and a half (1-1/2) hours per week to introduce some specifics on loss of innocence. This topic will explore and process information on where individuals in early stages of their lives were victimized, and how their experiences of victimization, and resulting trauma, helped shape their present time coping strategies, and social identities.

Finally we will focus on violence. We will study and look at if from a survivors or victims point of view while understanding the impact of violence on self, family, children and community. Hopefully this will raise awareness and promote the desire to be accountable, and build empathy skills.

CHRIS GRAJEDA

Even the hardest of us have hearts. We've known this next writer for quite some time now. And whether he's in our offices or in our workshops, we can't deny the fact that we miss having young Chris around. At times he was an utter challenge for The Beat, but he always made us think and for that we appreciate him. Right now he finds himself in Preston Youth Correctional Facility (a Y.A. institution) in Ione, CA. And this week he gives us two heartfelt poems to a girl he obviously adores, which goes to show you that we are humans too. We can't wait to hear more from him and hope he's staying as positive as possible where he is. With that we give to the floor to our beloved Chris Grajeda.

My Angel

The Lord sent me an angel form the heavens above
One that cares about me and shows me love
A lady so tender and sweet
When I look at her my heart skips a beat

One that's intelligent and loves me to death
You're the one I'll love till my very last breath
You're the sexiest lady I ever met
You were an angel in heaven that God should've kept

Your like a spring flower that bloomed just that fine
I got to be blessed 'cause you're all mine
Your skin so soft from your head to your toes
Best believe I won't hesitate to lick down below

I just don't know how God let it be
That he sent an angel just for me!

Don't Lie

You ain't got to lie to me girl just be upfront
I'll be your number one lover ain't know need to stunt
Ain't no need to cheat
I'll give you everything you want, even massage your feet
We could be under the covers, bodies, sheddin' mutual heat

Just give me a minute, it just a matter of time
Before I sweep you off your feet and make you mine
I never believed in love at first sight
Until I met you I seen the light
Now I refuse to live without you in my life

All I need you to do is be faithful girl
Don't run around and cheat be faithful girl
I'll be the only man that rocks your world
We could be like Bonnie and Clyde
Forever and a day will ride
Side by side
Together forever
I'll be there through all the stormy weather

Just give me a chance I'll hold you down
Ride for you 'till I'm 6 feet under the ground
All I need you to do is open your eyes
Trust in me baby girl and tell no lies

POLICARPO AYALA

We think a big reason why our country keeps throwing impossible obstacles at our youth is because they don't feel it the way we do. They can't put a human face on the people their locking up because none of those being locked up are 'their' people. What if our president had ever been locked up? Would he still be so focused on a war elsewhere? Well, we like writers like our next one because they put a human face to what's going on. Sure, he's made mistakes as many of us have. However, the difference is we make it much harder on him to redeem himself if we decide to lock him up for years on end. This is a new writer introduced to us by our dear friend, Mikhail Markasev and like Mikhail he's also writing from Corcoran State Prison. Hopefully we'll hear more from both of them.

A Life in Vain

Imprisoned to a 5 by 10 cell,
And at times it feels close to hell,
Blocked in by cement walls,
Bloodstains show that this was another man's fall,
Trapped in this cage writing verses,
Most of you'll brotha's know these same curses,
Visualizing the day when you'll take the short,
Ride in hearses,
Should have known you'll face your crucifixion,
That comes with hood crews and gang addiction,
Hopin' and wishin' for a benediction,
For years you faded suckas for fame and glory,
But now you hope?
That little homies will live telling your story,
You stayed true to the game,
Letting your nuts hang,
In your heart you knew you'll never change,
Failed to realize that sinful way,
Had you locked down with shackles and chains,
Your actions lead to prison then followed by death,
Living without vision, until your final breath,
And as you wrestle with the tormenting pain,
Reality hits hard — you spent yours in vain.

Dear Beat

As always strong embracements are extended to all who seek good. My number one prayer is that you enjoy your days, even though they're filled with sorrow, the Lord will bless you with a better tomorrow.

Never the less, I wrote the following poems for you to peep. Many of us go for days living these lives. I was one of many, and I ended up in the pen. Left with only "hope and wishes." Hopin' that someone would write me or visit me, and wishin' that my day will come that I'll be out.

Well, I 'm still here, hopin' and wishin'. And the reason I say this is, I don't want you to wait!! You youth have a whole life ahead of you. I've been in the SHU in Corcoran and have been to many prisons and I seen so many young men come in and say, "I wish I would have seen the light, and now I am in for life..."

And I just stand there with a pain inside, because I know he ain't fully grasped the fact that this is his dwelling for life. And I know some of you are changed from your stay at the hall. And the day you depart from the walls, you will strive for betterment, And I'm so proud of you for just taking the initiative to do such. I'll pray for you!

There is a saying, "Never measure your progress through the obstacles you have overcome; but through the bridges you have yet to cross."

May the Lord keep you all... Stay strong and carry on!

Bars of My Life

From a little bad boy fallin' out of trees,
To a knucklehead knockin' fools to there knees,
A bad seed, the black sheep of my family tree,
Being a savage was only expected to be...

Started selling "D" 'cause there was no hope for me,
Hood politics I didn't see 'cause I stood on my own "G",
Banging hoes and jackin' riches,
Seeing king pins turn into snitches,
Friends turn into foes through greed,
Gun bustin' as I watched suckas bleed,
Day after day filled with insanity,
Never realized the stress I put on my family,
Blowing weed sippin' on my number one enemy,
Never tripped on school cause there was nothing there for me,
Things changed when I came to the penitentiary,
Being watched by the man with the gun,
What once was a game played for fun,
Gots me locked away from my son,
And that's when I fell to my knees,
Hoping God would hear my pleas,
Blessed be my enemies,
'Cause I know they gots malice in their hearts for me,
And that's not what I want to be,
All I ever wanted was to be a daddy,
To my little "E"

Defined a Man

Cradled from birth and held from harm,
Made safe by the love of a mother's arms,
A feeling unto grace as is the stars above,
So close no matter how far, love unconditionally,
From the very start,
So many hurt so many sad,
Too many brokens and too many mad's,
One tear, one laugh,
One kiss so glad,
I knew you'll never stop loving me,
Even though I was so bad,
And when I was a boy you held my hand,
Loved unconditionally a love I did not yet understand,
With only a backward glance,
The harden years become a man,
And now locked away from home I finally understand.

MIKE BURGE

This next writer is writing from Hunt Correctional Institute. He's there for medical treatment. However, he's usually located in Louisiana State Prison (Angola) in Angola, Louisiana. In his cover letter he mentions that one benefit of the transfer was that he was allowed to have a contact visit with his brother. He writes, "I had a contact visit as we sat at a table together. Although I was still shackled up, it was the first time I was able to touch him and give him a hug in 20 years." He ends with the words, "prison life sucks." He's really a great writer that has much to teach from one of the hardest prisons in the country to be in. We hope to hear more from him soon because we've really enjoyed him thus far.

A Soldier

(Doing Life Without Parole)

The Louisiana State Penitentiary is simply called "Angola" because it sits in a very small town called Angola, Louisiana. Angola is tough, and if you're going to endure and survive, you must be a soldier because Angola is a battlefield of life as well as a battlefield of death. And for each man that shows up, there will come a time that his future will bear to light before him, that he will understand that he may not come back, that he may perish here. And it is during that moment that he will recognize what freedom and dignity is. He will comprehend them and keep them with him. His family will keep him in their hearts, and he will carry them in his. He will meditate and reflect, remembering his homeland. He will appreciate the reality of knowing there are those who wait for him. God be with him.

You Do Count

To our youth, you do count, and you can make a difference in the community today just by letting your voices be heard in schools and recreation. Let them know that you are tired of the gangs getting all the attention and tell the drug dealers, it's time for them to take a break. It's time to take a stand, expand your mind, because it all free for now, as long as you stay in school and I stress, help a friend along the way. Then he or she is going to help a friend. It's called a change reaction because you are helping people not be afraid to try because they see they are not alone out there.

Life is so good when you are doing right. When we allow ourselves to be positive and that means you don't have to worry about being caught up in the BS. Start getting involved in after-school programs, sports. The most important thing to remember is you have a choice today, even if you are sitting in the juvenile hall, you still have a choice. You have to take the responsibility of your actions and only then will you really see what you're looking for and you might be surprised like me, because that's when I found myself. I have made a lot of mistakes in my life and I don't want to see any of you making the same mistakes I have because life is too short to spend it caught up in the system or as a gang-banger.

Where I am at today I see a lot of poor choices that have been made by people like me. That's why I'm reaching out, speaking out to our youth, before it's too late. Because as I sit here in prison, it means a lot to me to try to help pave a positive way for our sisters and brothers. If you truly put your mind to it you can make it, and feel great about your accomplishment. Life has a lot to offer. You just have to really want it in order for your dream to come true. And especially our youths in East Palo Alto, you do count, so let your voices be heard. Other communities will follow by your success. So let's be leaders by becoming positive in our community. Loyal Beat Reader, the future is in our hands. Anything the mind can believe the mind can achieve. Stay focused and pass it on!

KEITH SMITH ***This next writer is as passionate about helping the younger generation as anyone else we know. Writing from State Prison in San Diego, CA, he continues to express his passion to encourage young people from his native East Palo Alto. He has been so motivated by "the press" he's been getting in The Beat that he has encouraged his cellmate to write in as well. We need more people like Keith Smith in the world today and we're blessed to have him featured in our pages. Thank you for giving the youth things our country is failing to give them — education.***

Youth Awareness

My name is Keith Smith. I wrote a couple of times, always trying to bring something positive to the readers out there. Youths, I hope you are focused and being positive! Today I sit in prison, looking in the mirror and I pray that you don't make it this far as a result of poor choices. Believe me, if you are sitting in juvenile hall it's time to look at yourself and ask yourself what's next, because you have a choice today of how you are going to live today. If you need help, ask your PO, or friend, family member, anybody that you know who's positive. You have to make that change, brothers and sisters, before it's too late. We have to believe in ourselves before anyone else is going to believe in us. Believe that!

For the youth on the streets, please set positive goals that you can accomplish weekly and share them with your friends, because it might inspire them to change and seek a positive path. Remember, two is better than one. When we are paving the road for others to follow, people really react to kindness in a positive way. Try it and watch the result you get from just helping someone.

Remember, out history don't have to be our future!

J.P. WEST ***Another writer introduced by a good friend of ours and we trust his judgment for good reason. This next first time writer speaks about not appreciating the moments we have here on this earth, which we're sure most people can relate to. For in the daily routine of our lives, there isn't much time for us to stop and think about how blessed we are to be where we are, or how blessed we are 'to be', period. It's always a fulfilling feeling to stop and be grateful because who knows what tomorrow holds. So as he writes from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA, let's do J.P. West a favor and take a moment to appreciate what we've been given — life.***

Forsaking the Moment

Your days are numbered,
Yet you live for tomorrow,
Forsaking the moment,
With greed instead of sorrow.

What makes you worthy,
That you so freely live,
Forsaking the moment,
You take and never give,
What about the homeless,
The sick and lame,
You're forsaking the moment,
As if it were a game,

The clock is ticking,
The next tick may be your last,
Forsaking the moment,
As if it were the past,

Your time has come,
You've breathed your last breath,
Forsaking the moment,
Into the arms of death,

The bright light guides you,
To the foot of His thrown,
The forsaking is all over
As you stand there alone.

God's Grace

For many years now frustration,
Defeated the words that entangled my mind,
Those overwhelming and mixed emotions,
The feelings that my pen could not find,
And no matter how many the pages,
Or the attempts in determination that I tried,
Frustration would always defeat me
And in tears I would break down and cry,

In the gloom and darkness of prison,
From the shadows of torment and shame,
The bright light that has once guided me,
Has become but a flickering small flame,
The illuminated hope of forgiveness
Has inspired & strengthened me,
The will to survive, to live, and thrive,
For something my eyes could not see,

Yet God had a plan and his grace stayed my hand,
In attempts to set myself free,
I'd condemned to an existence in this lonely, isolated place,
And discovered a truth of love and forgiveness,
In Christ Jesus — Eternally God's grace.

For there are no words for existence,
My pen could never find to express what I know is real,
But God knows my heart and in him I trust,
To show you the way that I feel.

EDWARD ***Writing from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA, we bring to you a man we've published before. Only the last time it was under the pseudonym Da' Ru▪est. We made a mistake last time because we didn't realize that referred to the gang he's in. Anyhow, we apologize but we can't print things that refer to where you're from or what you bang specifically. However, we can print things that teach and that's what he's doing. Next time, we hope he stays away from putting what he bangs out there because you don't have to refer to your gang specifically to teach about gangs. We did our best to edit it this time, but didn't want to cut the pieces altogether because this writer really has a lot of good things to say. In his first piece, a poem, he talks about what seems like someone in particular and how conniving they are. The piece that really hit home with us was his second piece. It's a little bit of an explanation about what has made him the man he is today. And you can see, he's been through a whole lot, which explains some of the wisdom. We haave mixed feelings because though he's letting the younger generation know that they should think twice before doing anything that lands them in jail, he still seems to glorify (on a small level) the gang lifestyle. Maybe we're reading too much into him, or maybe we're just right. Well, really there's only one way to find out. So read on and form your own opinion.***

During this time of utter abandonment and lack of a mother's love I developed a heartless, feelingless mentality as a defense mechanism to shield myself from being comforted. I embraced the gang life because at the time they are who I felt most relaxed to be with.

Ghost Jackets

Like snakes they slitha' within the crowd
Interminglin' wit the best and least expected
Unbeknownst to the naked eye
And hard to detect by a naïve mind
Sho' they talk the talk
But when it comes to walkin' the walk
They halt
Fo' what? Shhh I don't know
But I know one thang what you starin' at me fo'?
Is it somethin' about me that raises
Suspicion
Or is it the fact that I threaten yo'
Position
Yeah these otha' cats might not peep yo'
Scheme
But I read between yo' lies
And shattered ya' dreams
U's a sucka' fo' sure but who would of knew
That a sucka' like you was runnin' the crew
G! what about you makes you a G?
In my eyes you's a ...
You know what I ain't even gon'
Disrespect you dawg
But I know one thang is you not a hogg
A G you not, but a sucka' fo' sure
A snitch maybe, but who would know?
As long as number one exposes ya' game
You can fake the funk and ya' ghost
Jacket shall remain...
Listen carefully and observe the dudes and/or
Females you surround ya' self with
'cause a lot of these people ain't really wit the business...

Dear The Beat Within

Salutations and gratitude, my name is Edward. I am a 21-year old African and Hispanic descent currently incarcerated in Corcoran SHU. I am subjected to serve a 12-year sentence for second-degree robbery and street gang enhancement. 6 months after I turned 16 I was apprehended and I've been in ever since.

First time ever being convicted of a crime yet I was a victim to that of Proposition 21, which enabled the courts to try me as an adult. Three other defendants on my case disturbingly one is that of my brother. At times I blame myself for his conviction but in turn I feel as though he didn't have to go with me. So far it's been 5 years and some change since I've seen the other side of these dreadful walls.

As of now I, two of my brothers and my biological mother are all convicted felons and incarcerated. Dang on shame, huh? Before all of this transpired I was a ward of the state that witnessed, lived, and survived the horrors of many group homes and placements. Seldomly have I ever lived with those of my own flesh and blood. Briefly throughout my life I stayed with my sister, auntie, and my step mom. Although they were receptive to accept me I chose the latter of distancing myself to avoid developing any form of attachment.

My biological mother was and/or has been absent from my life since I was about 18 months to 2 years old due to her imprisonment. During this time of utter abandonment and lack of a mother's love I developed a heartless, feelingless mentality as a defense mechanism to shield myself from being comforted. I embraced the gang life because at the time they are who I felt most relaxed to be with.

I've been involved in the gang life since 1994. Since then I've committed countless crimes I shall not speak for fear of future prosecution. I am a loyal and dedicated gangsta but at times I view it as a burden I casted upon myself. Do I regret the decision to grasp the gang life? No, but I do feel as though it is the debt of me. Just on this first encounter of the justice center I've experienced juvenile hall (CJH, LP, Sylmar) L.A. County Jail (Juvenile Module 4600) and prison (CCI, Y.O.P, and mainline, WSP, FSP, MCSP, SCC, HDSP and now CSP-Corcoran).

As your staff and readers can see I've endured quite a few facilities. Since I've been in prison I've spent the majority of my time in lock up (Ad-Seg and/or SHU) for various acts of behavioral misconduct (riots, assault and batteries, and mutual combats). This time I have to pull 10 months in the SHU (security housing unit) for a knife (shank) being found in my property. I got 12 years already and now I'm facing possible prosecution for possession of a weapon. I myself am in the same building and section as Qadafi Five Percenter, also James Crawford is a comrade of mines, both of whom I read passages from.

With that said, I am also facing validation for being a prison gang member and/or shot caller for my personal gang which carries that of an indeterminate SHU term. I chose to write to enlighten all those juveniles out there to the facts that crime isn't a way of life. America's laws are becoming stricter on that of juveniles. It doesn't matter whether female or male. Just one crime cost me 10 years and 8 months of my life plus I now have 2 strikes which was part of a plea-bargain so if I do the littlest thing then I'm subjected and vulnerable to be stuck and/or sentenced to life in prison. Please by all means take heed to my words for I am that of someone who has walked in a lot of your shoes so I know what I'm talking about. With that said learn from my mistakes.

Lastly, I hope you're able to print my whole story if not then at least spread the word. Also here's a piece I wrote called "ghost jackets" maybe y'all can put it in ya' weekly publishing if you would like more writing let me know contact info enclosed.

I should be scared of nothing or no one. But when your minds playing tricks on you there's nothing you or anybody else can do about it.

STEPHON N. WILLIAMS Writing from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA, we bring to you a very sad piece by our dear friend. We know that many of our loved ones suffer from mental illness and it's a hard situation to deal with. But when you're suffering from such an illness in a place like jail, the problems are multiplied greatly. We can't help but be disgusted at how we treat people — whether incarcerated or not — in this country. Hopefully, we will be better at dealing with mental illness in the future. And to you Stephon, keep your head as high as possible and we'll continue publishing your knock out pieces.

My Mind Is Playing Tricks On Me

Let me start off by saying that I've been a mentally ill patient/ prisoner for over thirteen years. I've been hearing voices since the day my mother died. Which has been in 1989. Even though I have been placed on these medications that this prison as well as all of the prisons I've been in gave to me. It just don't stop the voices. I try other things to stop these voices from stressing me out, such as do a lot of writing... like now for instance. It just don't work. Did I happen to mention that I'm also seeing things that aren't there? I tell you this much, I'm all messed up.

What was that? I thought I just seen something run across the floor. I might have been mistaken, I don't think so-there it goes again. Crap, my minds playing tricks on me! No I don't do drugs, at least not anymore. But that did not mess up my mind — or did it? Oh well, let's move on shall we. I really think all this mind playing tricks on me started when my family stopped writing to me... so, if this is something you look forward to becoming, then by all means — come to prison. For you see- there it goes again...

I would call for the c/o's to come and help me to find out what it is running around in my cell, but they'll only wants to move me to the prison hospital for a few days. Which won't do me any good except for to have me hearing things and seeing things sitting in the corner in the dark of the night, which will have me shaking like a little girl. Hell, I'm a man, weighing at 212 pounds. I should be scared of nothing or no one. But when your minds playing tricks on you there's nothing you or anybody else can do about it. These doctors tell me that I needs to find myself a happy place? Damn, Doc, I'm a black man in prison with only two things on his mind? "Becoming free of this hell hole... And being with the opposite sex if you know what I mean."

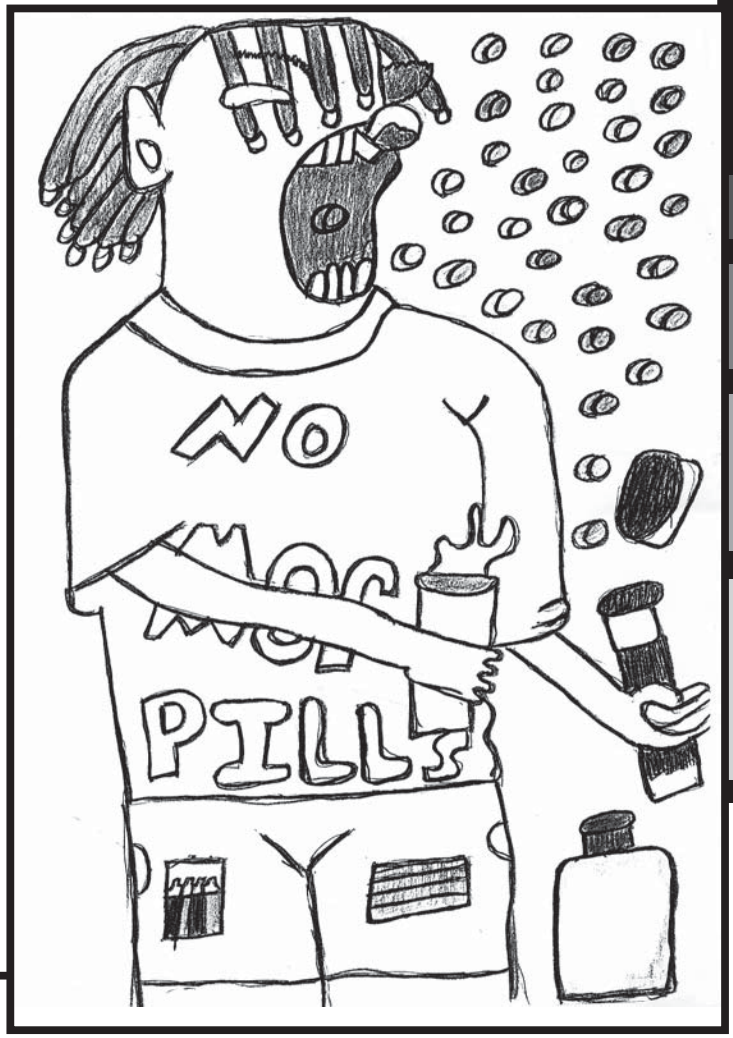
There my mind went again. The two things I really want is to stop hearing these voices and to stop seeing things! Everything else can wait, I'm a sick man and I need some help. I'm in a cell by myself, and one night I could have swore up and down that when I got up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, I thought there was somebody sleeping in the empty bed right next to me? I almost screamed, and it was around 3:30 A.M so I just about pissed in my drawers. But then as always, my mind was playing tricks on me.

I know that I'm way beyond help, why? Because I hold conversations with myself... you might say that ain't nothing. Ah, but here's the catch, not only do I talk, but I also answers the questions that I ask. I does this a lot. So much that my neighbor (Yogi) calls over to me and asks me who am I talking to or did I say something to him? I just tell him you know how it is, just talking to myself as always. He says yes I know, you've been talking to yourself for over an hour so I had to ask if you was alright. I tell him that I'm cool, but really I'm not. My mind's playing tricks on me!

I can't seem to escape this feeling that I have that somebody's always watching me... I could/would say that it's my mother watching over me everyday-but I don't think that she could see me behind these walls so thick? And if see did see me, can she see these other things running around in this cell that I myself can't. Can she tell me who or what they are? What is it the want from me? Why are they doing this to me in the first place? I've done nothing that warrants this kind of mind games... even if it's my own mind playing these tricks on me.

I know that I'm not all by myself in this matter, because there are a lot of you out there and who are in jail that are still coming down from some kind of crazy drugs. I know that you're either hearing voices or seeing things! Or maybe you're just one of those sick kind of drug users... you know who you are... the ones with things crawling all over you that you just can't get off nor can you shake it off! Trust me, your mind is now playing big tricks on you for sure.

You might remember my name from one of my stories I wrote to The Beat? "Confessions Of A Crack Addict." I smoked it so much, that I've not been right every since... so my saying to you who reads this, and anything else I just so might happen to write. Pay close attention to my words and away from "all" drugs, and your mind won't play tricks on you! Until next time, stay away from those who sale/ use drugs! Damn, I've got to catch this thing that's running around in my cell? Don't worry about me, my mind is always going to play tricks on me!!



RAY SANCHEZ JR. ***We say it every time he writes and we're going to keep saying it every time he writes. This next writer is one of our favorites and if you've been reading The Beat in the last couple years, you know his name all too well. Writing from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA, he offers 'hope' and a little information about 'truth and symbolism.' There are deep thoughts coming out of the minds of the incarcerated, but the reason we really enjoy Ray's deep thoughts is because he expresses them so well on paper. His heart bleeds to teach the younger generation and for that we appreciate him. He takes thoughts that are looked at as the norm, and breaks them down until you find yourself disagreeing with those 'normal' thoughts. His writing speaks for itself so we're going to cut this intro a little short.***

Truth And Symbolism

All forms of life use symbolism. Cells use biochemical and electric impulses to interact and organize. Animals use pheromones to mark territorial borders and attract mates. Humans use symbols in religious practices, politics, representation of beliefs, the list goes on. We are, however, the only creatures on Earth to place more value in the symbol than the institution, group, idea, or belief it represents. The whole reason behind the symbol becomes less real to us. This is a truth reinforced by religious wars and border disputes.

Gangs used symbolic number, colors, and logos. Some don't even know just what their particular symbol is rooted in, and still follow it blindly into turf war. People die for ideas.

Krishnamurti said, "There is hope in men, not in society, not in systems, organized religious systems, but in you and me." He believed that symbols tend to group us for the wrong reasons at times. To him, truth, who we are and what works for us, inside us. It is as unique to the world.

I identify myself as Catholic, though I don't always agree with the many dogmas of the church. I do not see myself a Catholic because of a cross or a ceremony. It was not because my mother raised me as one — I could just have easily changed my religion as a pair of socks if I so chose to do so. I am catholic because the spirit of the religion rings true inside my soul. I "feel" the religion inside my soul as I pray. Very much like a twig fork within my heart reacting to a certain chord plucked by God. This might not be so for you, but it is for me. We are each unique and can't be expected to react to the same stimuli in the same way.

I am a firm believer in leading by example. I also believe that it is not necessarily the example that holds the truth so much as the spirit behind the action. Krishnamurti also said that Truth cannot be repeated. If we are all unique individuals with unique truths, how can it be repeated? If I tell you the sky is pink and in my mind, it might actually be pink and for you it appears blue, who is right? We both are. Our perception of truth is just different. So, I may lead by example working in a soup kitchen on Christmas, though this might not seem an attractive idea to you. And indeed, may hold no intrinsic value to you should you actually repeat all that I do. But, the spirit of what I do, the thing that pushes my soul to behave in such a way, may also move you. It might ring true in your heart and manifest itself through an act of kindness to a complete stranger. By this way, you have taken in the symbolism used by my inner truth and adapted it to what is good and true to your unique spirit; you have applied the individual truth that is within you to the world around you.

Although symbols can rally people to a cause, it is the uniqueness of the individual that gives group strength. It is my hope that you come to realize this individual strength when peer pressure, group-think, or the hypnotizing lure of gang/political zymology urges you to do something that does not feel fight. I pray that you feel and know the strength that rests within your unique soul so that you may over come the false beliefs of the many.

Who Would You Be?

If I took away your name, who would you be?
Without a gang, what would you represent?
Are you simply a collection of desires,
Thoughts and ideals?
What really makes you, you?
Is it what you do, have done,
Or how you feel?

Why does it seem others have it easy?
Was it your lot to struggle, hustle, grind?
If you were predestined, why?
Why do you have to sacrifice,
When others just simple shine?
Do we deny ourselves truths already know
Questions with important answers
That are rarely spoken
Do we bury them and forget, only to regret,
Once, under ignorance's burden,
Our lives are broken?

If I took away your name, who would you be?
Would you even have an identity?
Or just be one of many
As opposed to being unique
Question your purpose:
"Is this what I really want
Or just what's easiest for me?"

We lose ourselves in symbols
A star, a cross, a flag, a nationality
A set of beliefs, structures, dogmas
We place borders on the soul
We try to make sense of nonsensical reality
If we are unique, then there is no "normal"
What works for you, may not work for me
There are no true groups, simply similarities
One common factor enmeshed in our being
The capability to love and be loved
In love we are the same, unique and free
If I took away your name,
Beliefs,
Identity,
Love is who'd you be.

Relativity

Could it be that man is the measure of all things?
Is this why I find you in the simplest things?
Inmate or scholar; prison or monastery?
Perspective is relative and all views can vary.

Was I so blinded by the monetary, and impermanent,
That I could not appreciate and be content?
Perhaps there were just too many distractions present
Perhaps bad intentions aren't conditioned,
Just inherent
Perhaps this tragedy to the world is not yet apparent

The sky is blue and air cleaner than it was in past days
Comparable only to the innocent ignorance of youthful age
All simplicities of the world,
On my heart now have sway
At what point in my life did I lose that wonder?
Why did it take prison for me to once again find my way?

Gangs used symbolic number, colors, and logos. Some don't even know just what their particular symbol is rooted in, and still follow it blindly into turf war. People die for ideas.

Hope (Part II)

Dear Lord, it's me again
Still hopin' and copin'
Still tryna maintain and fix what was broken
Still, I'm thankful for blessings received
I pray for reprieve
I pray that one day, you'll allow me to leave

I hope my daughter remembers me,
And isn't ashamed
I hope when asked about me, she
Doesn't conveniently disremember my name
Embarrassed of dad's ties
To the drugs and the gangs

I hope she isn't proud of my past either
I don't want her
To falsely value pops as a rider
I'd rather be forgotten
Than thought of as an idle
I hope she understands
I was motivated by greed, hate, and survival

I hope and I struggle, cause my options is few
Finding balance 'tween extremes
Which road should I choose?
Should I fold 'cause I can or smash 'till I'm damned?
I feel these decisions dissecting
All that I am

I hope there's a plan
I hope these trials ain't for nothing
It's hard to have blind faith

RAY SANCHEZ JR. (CONT.)

But a broke man with faith,
Ain't broke 'cause he at least has something
Even if it's simply spiritual

You drive the meek to do great deeds
So, why ain't you healed pops?
I've humbled myself and prayed on my knees
I've followed your teachings, all your commands
I'd trade you my life,
Just to save that one man

I know it don't work that way, but I still hope
I hope you ease his pain, and sooth mom's soul
I hope I parole
So I can help mom at home
I know she cries behind doors, in the dark
And all alone
She ain't never did nuthin' wrong
Can't lie, for this I'm pissed at cha
Were you here, I'd swap, grab and b***h slap ya'
Have to ask ya', why was this done
And hope you forgive, the ways of your son

I hope and I struggle, 'cause my options is few
Finding balance 'tween extremes
Which road should I choose?
Blind rage enslaves
And it's hard to find peace these days
Difficult to keep hopin' while I'm stuck in a cage

PRETTY BOY ***So much talent in the air this week that it's hard for us to keep going as we're stuck in our own awe at everything we're reading. This next writer follows along with the power of this publication with his own powerful contributions. He writes two poems. The first, 'Never Give Up,' is an inspirational piece that says don't settle for halfway change. Instead keep it going because that's what life is all about. He writes from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA, and we're patiently waiting for more.***

Life Is In The Heart

Life is a wonder that is filled with obstacles and tests,
That can leave one to cease or leave one to progress…
The key to progress is letting your heart be your strength,
Being in control of your future by all the vital moves that you make…
And even though sometimes life may seem to suddenly get rough, Remember to let your heart be your strength
And just to never give up…
For after every stormy night there will come a bright sunny day,
That will shine hope inside your life and guide you on your way…
So always remember forever to shine just like a star,
And finish this life's race for true life lies in the heart!!

As I sit in my cell and stare at this place,
All eyes are on me and they laugh up in my face
Not knowing how I feel or the knowledge that I bear
But I think to myself why I should I even care

Never Give Up

As I sit in my cell and stare at this place,
All eyes are on me and they laugh up in my face
Not knowing how I feel or the knowledge that I bear
But I think to myself why I should I even care
This is my life and I live for only me
My future is in my hands and one day I'll be free
To fix all mistakes that I should have done began
Cleaning up my life and being me the true man
Look at me now how you want and think all that you will
But I will be a success for I know my own hearts will
So to all my brothers and sisters changing their lives I do shout
Keep striving towards your future for that's what life is about
Head up to the sky for we finally listened to our heart
We could have done it all along for it was with us from the start

Every day each of us inches closer and closer to becoming a winner or a loser at the end of our journey. Ultimately, the difference isn't measured by success or failure, but in refusing to accept failure as the final outcome.

check out the rest of Mikhail Markhasev's BWO piece on page 49